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# NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL

MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA

## THESIS

**THE SECOND FRONT: GRAND STRATEGY AND CIVIL-  
MILITARY RELATIONS OF WESTERN ALLIES AND THE  
USSR, 1938-1945**

by

Denys Schur

March 2005

Thesis Advisor:

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<b>REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE</b>			<i>Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188</i>	
Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instruction, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302, and to the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reduction Project (0704-0188) Washington DC 20503.				
<b>1. AGENCY USE ONLY (Leave blank)</b>		<b>2. REPORT DATE</b> March 2005	<b>3. REPORT TYPE AND DATES COVERED</b> Master's Thesis	
<b>4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE:</b> The Second Front: Grand Strategy and Civil-Military Relations of Western Allies and the USSR, 1938-1945			<b>5. FUNDING NUMBERS</b>	
<b>6. AUTHOR(S)</b> Denys Schur				
<b>7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)</b> Naval Postgraduate School Monterey, CA 93943-5000			<b>8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER</b>	
<b>9. SPONSORING /MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)</b> N/A			<b>10. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY REPORT NUMBER</b>	
<b>11. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES</b> The views expressed in this thesis are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of Defense or the U.S. Government.				
<b>12a. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT</b> Approved for public release; distribution is unlimited			<b>12b. DISTRIBUTION CODE</b>	
<b>13. ABSTRACT (maximum 200 words)</b> The debate about grand strategy in the Second World War has scarcely ended even in the 21st Century. The present study examines the classical issue of the grand strategy in Europe and the anti-Hitler coalition as concerns the US-UK-Soviet exchange about the Second Front. The great phenomenon of the Second World War was the creation of an unprecedented military alliance between the western powers and the Soviet Union. Due to mutual antagonism the inter-Allied cooperation during the Second World War was very complicated and at times extremely tense. Perhaps the most acute disagreement in the relationship between the Allies was the "Second Front" controversy. Despite desperate Soviet demands to open the Second Front as soon as possible, the Western Allies launched a massive cross-channel operation in the northwestern Europe only in June 1944. This thesis analyses the reasons of why it took the western powers so long to organize and execute such an operation and its implications for the post-war order. The detailed analysis of the grand strategy during the Second World War is one of the ways to comprehend the violent 20 <sup>th</sup> Century amid the carnage of the 21 <sup>st</sup> Century and its own problems of grand strategy.				
<b>14. SUBJECT TERMS</b> The Second Front, Grand Strategy, Western Allies and the Soviet Union			<b>15. NUMBER OF PAGES</b> 84	
			<b>16. PRICE CODE</b>	
<b>17. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF REPORT</b> Unclassified	<b>18. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE</b> Unclassified	<b>19. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF ABSTRACT</b> Unclassified	<b>20. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT</b> UL	

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**THE SECOND FRONT: GRAND STRATEGY AND CIVIL-MILITARY  
RELATIONS OF WESTERN ALLIES AND THE USSR, 1938-1945**

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Captain, Ukrainian Army  
B.S., Leningrad High Military-Political College, 1991

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

**MASTER OF ARTS IN SECURITY STUDIES  
(CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS)**

from the

**NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL  
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## **ABSTRACT**

The debate about grand strategy in the Second World War has scarcely ended even in the 21st Century. The present study examines the classical issue of the grand strategy in Europe and the anti-Hitler coalition as concerns the US-UK-Soviet exchange about the Second Front. The great phenomenon of the Second World War was the creation of an unprecedented military alliance between the western powers and the Soviet Union. Due to mutual antagonism, inter-Allied cooperation during the Second World War was very complicated and at times extremely tense. Perhaps the most acute disagreement in the relationship between the Allies was the “Second Front” controversy. Despite desperate Soviet demands to open the Second Front as soon as possible, the Western Allies launched a massive cross-channel operation in the northwestern Europe only in June 1944. This thesis analyses the reasons why it took the western powers so long to organize and execute such an operation and its implications for the post-war order. The detailed analysis of the grand strategy during the Second World War is one of the ways to comprehend the violent 20<sup>th</sup> Century amid the carnage of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and its own problems of grand strategy.



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## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

I would like to express my deepest thanks to my academic advisors, two brilliant historians, Doctor Donald Abenheim and Doctor Daniel Moran, whose profound knowledge and determination inspired me to do this study. Their guidance and patience were the clues that helped me to complete this work. I am very grateful for their support, tolerance and understanding. I also thank the faculty and staff of the Naval Postgraduate School's Department of National Security Affairs for the important knowledge I have obtained while studying here, knowledge which, I hope, will be very useful in my future career. I give my special thanks to Richard Black-Howell, the editor of my thesis, who spent long hours making this thesis readable.

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

The debate about the effectiveness of the Allied grand strategy in the Second World War has scarcely ended even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The Second World War, which is truly considered the turning point of 20<sup>th</sup> century history, not only changed the geopolitical structure of the world, but also brought about a new political division, international tension, and violence, which spanned the second half of 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The crucial moment that ensured Allied victory in the Second World War and predetermined the shape of the post-war world was the opening of the Second Front in Europe in June 1944. This event proved to be fateful both for the people participating in the conflict and future generations. The Allied invasion in northern France not only facilitated and hastened the ultimate victory over Germany and Nazi ideology, but also brought about the division of the world into two antagonistic camps, the Western free world led by the United States leadership on the one hand, and the communist world under Soviet Union leadership on the other hand. The United States and Great Britain found themselves confronted by a former ally, one which seemed to some to be even more hostile to democracy and freedom than the Nazi regime. This hostility between former allies and unwillingness to find some kind of compromise led to the state of the Cold War, which continued up to 1991, and whose legacy is relevant in international relations even now. The course of rapid developments in the afterwar world and even in the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is the direct result of grand strategies implemented by major western powers, Great Britain, France, the United States of America, and the Soviet Union during the Second World War.

The present study examines the classical issue of the grand strategy of the war in Europe and the anti-Hitler coalition as concerns the US-UK-French-Soviet exchange about the Second Front. This thesis attempts to examine the grand strategies and civil-military relations of the Western Allies and the USSR as they relate to the creation of the Second Front in the European theater, from the period when the Second World War began, throughout the course of the war, and into its final phase, when the formation of the Bipolar World began.

It has been thought for decades that deep inter-allied discussions about opening the Second Front in northern France were aimed mostly at placating an insistent Stalin. The question of why it took the western powers so long to prepare, organize, and execute such an operation is still a point of historical controversy. Soviet historiography, for instance, for many years entertained the idea that Anglo-American hesitation to open the Second Front in Europe was induced by a cynical motive of achieving strategic and political advantages in a war with Hitler at the expense of Soviet Union.<sup>1</sup> This work attempts to establish the real reasons why the Second Front in Europe, which Stalin so desperately pleaded for, was opened no earlier than June 1944, and why it was not opened later.

It is not a recognized fact that the decision to launch some kind of military operation in Western Europe, which was to be conducted by Joint Anglo-American military forces, was made from the very moment when the anti-Hitler coalition was created. Stalin, who claimed that the USSR faced the entire military might of Nazi Germany, what was for the most part true, hoped that the western allies would find some way to relieve the Soviet Union from enormous German pressure. Both the United States and Great Britain agreed that a military operation in the Western Europe had to be conducted. The question was when and where. For the Soviet leadership the answer was clear: the Second Front should be opened in northern France to launch strategic offensive operation towards Berlin, thereby relieving Soviet troops on the Eastern Front and defeating Germany from opposite ends. The Soviet leadership believed that the sooner such an operation would be launched, the sooner the war would be over. For the Western allies the answer was not that clear. There were a number of obstacles facing any military operation in Europe prior to 1944, as well as disagreements between the United States and Great Britain about the theater where such an operation should be launched. The British government advocated that the main effort in Europe should be made in the

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<sup>1</sup> Keylor, William R., *The Twentieth-Century World, An International History*, p. 185, Oxford University Press, New York, Oxford, 2001

Mediterranean. In the eyes of British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, this strategy would "...not only have won the war with a minimum of bloodshed, but also have placed the West in advantageous position *vis-a-vis* the Soviet Union after it."<sup>2</sup>

American preference, contrary to British, was for conducting a large-scale military operation in Western Europe. American high military authorities believed that such a war could be won only with decisive battles. President Franklin Roosevelt was convinced that Germany should be severely punished for causing this war, in contrast to the First World War, in 1918, and therefore considered conducting significant military operations against Germany as of the utmost priority. Besides, President Roosevelt understood that the war could not be won just at the expense of the Soviet Union, and that the United States and Great Britain would have to contribute a considerable military effort in order to destroy Nazi Germany. John Harper in his book "American Visions of Europe" wrote of this matter, "FDR also realized that the kind of American-Soviet entente that he had envisioned since 1933 could not be built on the basis of Russian blood and American material alone - some American blood would have to be added to the mixture."<sup>3</sup>

All in all, both President Franklin Roosevelt and Prime Minister Winston Churchill were determined and resolute to destroy Hitlerism as soon as possible and by no means intended to win the war at the expense of Soviet Union. This study contends that the Second Front in Europe was opened in June 1944 for three main reasons: The differences between the strategic approaches of the Allied countries on the ways of waging total war caused strategic debate and precluded the opening of the Second Front until June 1944;

- Insufficient military preparedness of the Western Allies, particularly of the United States, to launch large-scale military operation in Europe until June 1944;
- Realization by Western Allies that in 1944 the Soviet Union was capable of destroying Nazi Germany without opening of the Second Front in Europe.

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<sup>2</sup> Howard, Michael, *The Mediterranean Strategy in the Second World War*, p. 10, Frederick A. Praeger, Publishers, New York, Washington, 1968

<sup>3</sup> Harper, John L., *American Visions of Europe*, p. 75, Cambridge University Press, New York, 1996

The last reason prompted the United States and Great Britain to escalate preparation and eventually conduct large-scale military operations in Western Europe in order to impose spheres of influence and preempt the spread of communist ideology all throughout the Europe.

The first chapter of this study presents the process of the creation of the anti-Hitler coalition as a logical result of the pre-war policies that the Western Allies and the Soviet Union pursued that let Hitler dominate almost the entire European continent. It indicates that the anti-Hitler coalition was not an expression of good will, but rather a product of extreme necessity.

The second chapter examines relations between the Allies and portrays the establishment of the Second Front in Europe as a result of the grand strategies and civil-military relations of the Western Allies and the USSR during the course of the Second World War. It traces the great strategic debate between the Western Allies and identifies the main reasons why the Second Front was not established until June 1944.

The third chapter deals with the implications of the Second Front on the post-war order and argues that the Second Front literally started the Cold War between the Western World and the USSR.

The conclusion summarizes and concludes the work providing the answer to main question of why the Second Front was opened in June 1944 and emphasizing the great irony of this important historical event.



## **II. THE COMING OF THE ANTI-HITLER COALITION**

One of the greatest and most mysterious factors that contributed to the destruction of Nazism in the Second World War was the military, economic, and political cooperation between the United States of America, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union. The phenomenon of inter-allied cooperation during the Second World War has remained a point of intense academic study up until the present. How did countries with totally different ideologies, economic systems, and political structures managed to forgo their principles and unite their efforts in fighting Fascism?

Considering the cooperation between Britain, the Soviet Union, and the United States during the Second World War, it must be understood that this coalition was more the product of extreme necessity than deliberate intention. The three states were united in a “Grand Alliance,” but in essence they could not be considered as a firm and reliable united entity. The coalition managed to survive due to one main reason - a common interest in defeating Germany. If any of these countries had been able to destroy Nazi Germany alone, the coalition would never have been formed. The German threat was the power and catalyst that prompted such unlikely bed fellows to unite their efforts in military action. Hostility to Hitler was the only characteristic that all three countries had in common.

### **A. WESTERN POWERS AND THE USSR ON THE WAY TO CREATION OF THE ANTI-HITLER COALITION**

The creation of “Grand Allies,” nevertheless, was not a simple act of uniting the efforts of Great Britain, the United States, and the Soviet Union to destroy Nazi Germany. The necessity of creating such an alliance was a direct result of political strategies that these three countries conducted at the brink and in the first years of war. The creation of the anti-Hitler coalition became possible as a consequence of following political realities:

- The preference of major European democracies, Great Britain and France, to deal with Nazi Germany rather than Communist Russia in the settlement of European turbulences at the end of 1930<sup>th</sup>;
- Stalin’s misgivings, underestimation of Hitler’s political vision, and cynicism that almost led to catastrophe for the Soviet state in the first stage of war;

- The decision of the US government to give a first priority to the European theater over the Pacific theater in the war.

The close examination of main tendencies in the political strategies of the Western Allies and the USSR on the eve and during the first years of the Second World War will help us to see the creation of the anti-Hitler coalition as a logical result.

## **B. MAIN EUROPEAN DEMOCRACIES (GREAT BRITAIN AND FRANCE)**

The British policy during the pre-war period can be characterized as a policy of appeasement. According to Peter Calvocoressi, "Appeasement describes a range of attitudes stretching from the desire to be fair and decent to a defeated foe to the policy of buying off a resurgent one. It covers the whole of the period between the wars, becoming more disreputable with time."<sup>4</sup> The object of appeasement this time was undoubtedly Nazi Germany. A considerable part of the ruling British class regarded Germany as a country that should play its due part in European affairs, and this vision did not change even when the Nazi regime became to reveal its real face. This conviction rested on the radical disagreement with France about the way, in which European democracies should behave toward Germany. Whereas France did not feel secure in its Rhine frontier, Great Britain felt that Germany was cheated by the restrictions and limitations on armament that were imposed on it by the Versailles treaty. This reality gave British leadership grounds to believe that if Nazi Germany were given certain pieces of territories, which Germany should have on the basis of the principle of equal rights, then Hitler's ambitions would be satisfied and Germany would become a peaceful country. That is why there was no objection from Britain when Germany absorbed Austria into the Reich. British and French leaders became more anxious when Hitler declared his intention to resolve the so-called Sudeten problem, in other words, to take under German protection the German minority that populated the Sudenland, a considerable part of western Czechoslovakia. The furious anti-Czechoslovak propaganda and demanding unacceptable concessions from the Czechoslovak government indicated that Hitler strove for no less than the destruction of the Czechoslovak state by military force. Being intimidated by the growing strength of the German army, the French government privately informed the Czech Prime-Minister in July 1938 that France would not go to war with Germany over the

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<sup>4</sup> Calvocoressi, Peter, Wint, Guy and Pritchard, John, *Total War, The Causes and Courses of the Second World War*, p. 82, Pantheon Books, New York

Sudetenland problem. Britain, in turn, did not want to escalate tensions with Germany since the issue of the Sudetenland was of no importance to British national interests. The anti-Hitler coalition could have been created at that time, since the Soviet Union was a formal ally of Czechoslovakia, but the USSR was committed to use its military force only when France had provided its military assistance. Rather than consider any course of action against Germany with the cooperation of the Soviet Union, the British and French governments preferred to make an agreement with Hitler, signed in Munich on September 29 1938, thereby abandoning their East-European ally and creating the preconditions for the Soviet Union to settle the Nazi-Soviet pact a years later. The reasons why the British and France governments came to such a decision can vary considerably. Yet, it might be assumed that the most apparent of them was that the Western powers felt that the cooperating with the Soviets in Eastern Europe would effectively concede the region as a Soviet sphere of influence. For the main western democracies, the Nazi regime in Germany was the lesser evil than the Soviet communist monster. Germany, no doubt, was not a friendly state, but both the British and French governments sincerely believed that Hitler was a person they could deal with. Moreover, British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain considered that if Hitler had been satisfied with some German demands regarding native Germans in other countries on the basis of national self-determination, it would have been possible to bring Germany into the European Versailles system. The Munich treaty and the partition of Czechoslovakia, in their opinion, removed the last obstacle to the reintegration of Germany into the European system. The future development of political events proved that the decision of the main western democracies to deal with Hitler rather than with the USSR in that European crisis not only dashed their hopes of seeing Germany as a peaceful European country, but also much facilitated for Hitler's implementation of his aggressive plans. Germany became a dominant power in the Eastern and Southern Europe since the unwillingness of Britain and France to defend their most trusted ally Czechoslovakia compelled the countries of Eastern and Southern Europe to reconsider their foreign policies and set up conditions for greater cooperation with Germany. Romania, Hungary, Bulgaria, and even Yugoslavia rapidly became supporters of German aggressive moves. Under such circumstances, Hitler hastened to tear up the Munich pact, and on March 15

1939, after the Slovak minority expressed their grievances against the Czech ruling elite, the eastern part of the country was occupied by German armed forces. It was the first time that German forces occupied territory which was not populated by native Germans, and therefore the Nazi government could not justify this act by the principle of national self-determination that had been invoked by Hitler during the occupation of the Rhineland, Austria, and the Sudetenland. The western part of Czechoslovakia, comprised of Bohemia and Moravia, and inhabited by Czechs, was transformed into a German protectorate, whereas the eastern part of the country, inhabited by Slovaks, was given the status of independent satellite state as Slovakia.

Faced with such an unprecedented aggressive act from Germany, the British and French changed the main direction of their foreign policies from appeasement to resistance. The British government took several drastic steps to demonstrate that Great Britain was determined to stop Germany from aggressive plans. First, it gave a territorial guarantee to Poland, and second, requested Parliamentary authorization to introduce universal military conscription. "Never before had Great Britain been willing to promise military assistance to a nation in Eastern Europe and to institute conscription during peacetime."<sup>5</sup> Britain and France also tried to create some kind of anti-Hitler coalition to oppose further German aggression, but found that most minor powers of Eastern and Southern Europe had by that time already chosen the direction of rapprochement with Germany in their foreign policies. The only country that was willing to create some kind of anti-German pact was still the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, the British and French governments were reluctant to establish military cooperation with the USSR, even though the threat of war with Germany was more obvious than ever. In most part, this reluctance was a result of the refusal of Poland to deal with the Soviet Union since the Polish government feared the influence of communist ideology and the possibility of loss of some eastern territories that were inhabited by considerable Ukrainian and Byelorussian populations. The position of the British and French was very shaky. Yet, facing the growing German menace, the British and French governments finally agreed on July 25 1939 to send official delegations to Moscow to discuss the possible creation of an anti-

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<sup>5</sup> Keylor, p.171

Hitler military coalition.<sup>6</sup> But the manner in which the British and French conducted these negotiations destroyed the last chance to produce some kind of military alliance capable of opposing Hitler's Germany. William R. Keylor gives vivid description of the way the negotiations took place,

The departure of the Anglo-French negotiation team was postponed for eleven days and then sent on its way not by airplane, which would have got the mission to Moscow in a day, but rather by a slowest possible means of oceanic transport, a 9, 000 ton passenger-cargo vessel. When it finally reached Moscow on August 11 after six days at sea, it consisted of low-ranking officers uncertain of their negotiating powers. When the talks got underway, the Anglo-French delegates evaded searching questions from the Soviet about the troop strength, military plans, and ways of persuading Poland and Romania to permit the passage of Russian military forces across their territory. The Russians could not help but compare the desultory behavior of the British and French governments to the eagerness of Chamberlain and Daladier to fly to Munich to deal directly with Hitler.<sup>7</sup>

The Moscow Anglo-French-Russian negotiations in August 1939 served as vivid indication that the British and French governments in their foreign policies preferred to deal with Nazi Germany rather than with Communist Russia in the European political crisis of the second half of the 1930s. The failure of these negotiations ultimately compelled Stalin to drastically change the direction of Soviet foreign policy toward Germany and deprived Great Britain and France of important ally against Hitler. On August 23 1939, Russia and Germany signed the Non-Aggression Pact, which included "secret additional protocol," defining the spheres of political interests of the two countries and plans for the fourth partition of Poland. Secure from the threat of two-front war, Hitler attacked Poland on September 1, 1939. Honoring their commitment to Poland, Britain and France declared war on Germany on September 3 1939. So far, there were a limited number of participants in a newly unfolded conflict, but it was clear that the Second World War had begun.

After declaring war on Germany, soon after Hitler invaded Poland, Britain and France found themselves in a strange position. They did not attack German positions, although the bulk of the Wehrmacht was involved in the Polish campaign. This period of

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<sup>6</sup> Keylor, p.173

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 174

the Second World War was called the “phony war,” because the actual fighting as such was absent. The strategy the British and French undertook was to mobilize all possible economic, military and manpower resources, thereby creating superiority over the enemy, to impose on Germany a blockade, using superior Allied navies and to conduct an aerial bombardment campaign against the German heartland. What neither the British nor French expected was that the Germans would use a totally different strategy and new innovative tactics – the skillful strategic deployment of inferior forces and using tanks to penetrate enemy lines and destroy communications while having infantry advance in a second way to destroy stunned and isolated enemy units. When, after having destroyed Poland, German troops invaded France and utilized these new military tactics, the success was complete. By July 1940, the British alone faced a powerful enemy that was master of almost all continental Europe.

The fast and effective victory over France inspired German leadership to hastily prepare the plan for the Battle of Britain, called “Operation Sea-Lion.” Yet, being inexperienced in the conduct of cross-channel operations and faced with furious resistance from the British Royal Air Force, the German military High Command quickly realized that a successful cross-channel operation against Britain could be possible only if German armed forces had control of the air. Thus, the battle for air superiority between the German Luftwaffe and British Royal Air Force, known as “the Blitz,” began.

According to British wartime Prime Minister Winston Churchill, the time of the Battle of Britain was the toughest and most difficult for the country in the course of the Second World War. This is understandable since the British had to fight for the survival of their country alone and with limited physical resources. In his memoirs “The Second World War,” Winston Churchill wrote,

Looking back upon the unceasing tumult of the war, I cannot recall any period when its stresses and the onset of so many problems all at once or in rapid succession bore more directly on me and my colleagues than the first half of 1941. The scale of events grew larger every year; but the

decisions required were not more difficult. Greater military disasters fell upon us in 1942, but by then we were no longer alone and our fortunes were mingled with those of the Grand Alliance.<sup>8</sup>

It was vital for the British to win the Battle of Britain not only to survive, but also to win over potential military allies, foremost among them the United States, but also Soviet Russia and Turkey. The Battle of Britain could be called the crucial moment of the entire course of the Second World War. Had the British not survived, the Grand Alliance, which ensured military, economic, and numerical superiority over Nazi Germany, would not have come about and the course of the war would have been unpredictable. To her credit, Great Britain was able to repel the German air assault and force German military leadership to abandon plans for the cross-channel operation. In addition to the courage and determination of the pilots of the Royal Air Force, there were a number of objective reasons that made it possible. According to William Keylor's "The Twentieth Century World," three main technological factors contributed to British victory over the German Air Force. First of all, it was the qualitative superiority of the British Royal Air Force over the German Luftwaffe that allowed the British to compensate for their numerical inferiority. New British "Spitfire" and "Hurricane" fighters exceeded German Messerschmitts in speed, maneuverability, and firepower. Secondly, at that time British possessed an innovative device radar. That allowed them to detect the enemy fighters in greater distances and dispatch their fighters right at the moment when the German planes were at the limits of operational range. In doing so, the British were able to conserve their fuel thereby often forcing the Germans to return to their bases without engaging in actual combat. Finally, by that time British intelligence had developed an electrical cipher machine, which allowed them to crack the German code and read Luftwaffe operational instructions.<sup>9</sup> Yet, the main reason for German failure in the Battle of Britain was that Hitler and his high command chose the wrong strategy. Hitler was an adherent of the strategic theory, quite popular at that time, that the massive bombardment of the civilian population would necessarily cause a mass uprising of civilians with the demand for capitulation by their government, and as a result, the fast end of the war. Under his order,

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<sup>8</sup> Churchill, Winston S., *The Second World War, The Grand Alliance, Germany Drives East*, p. 3, Heron Books, 1968

<sup>9</sup> Keylor, p. 180

the primary targets of the Luftwaffe became not military objectives, but the major British metropolitan areas. Contrary to Hitler's expectations, this strategy brought about not fast victory, but the complete failure of German air military adventure.

British vital military objects were preserved, and at the same time the moral and determination of the British civilian population were strengthened. William Keylor, in this regard, wrote,

Though German bombing raids killed 51,509 British civilians and damaged or destroyed one out of five British homes, they did not produce the widespread demoralization and civil unrest that the theorists of strategic bombing since Douhet had predicted. On the contrary, the Blitz... galvanized the population behind its leadership and stiffened its resolve to carry on the war.<sup>10</sup>

Great Britain survived during the Battle of Britain and saved her armed forces, physical resources and population, but she did not win the war. The country was still alone against a powerful Germany who was the master of almost all continental Europe. It was very obvious to the British government that Britain would have the chance to win the war only if she had strong allies, capable of drawing off the considerable forces of the Wehrmacht on the continent. That is why the British felt so much relief and inspiration when Hitler turned his armies toward the Soviet Union. At that moment the British realized that they were saved and, most importantly, that they were able to win the war. Ideological contradictions with the Soviet Union were almost forgotten; at least they were no longer taken into account. Britain was in a very difficult situation and needed any allies, no matter what political structure they had. In this situation, the unification of British and Soviet efforts in their struggle against the common enemy seemed to be nothing, but a logical result. British Prime Minister Winston Churchill made the radio announcement on the same day as the German invasion of the Soviet Union, June 22, 1941. In his appeal to the Soviet people, he emphasized that despite the fact that he had been the most furious anti-communist since the creation of the Soviet state, Great Britain and he personally, would do their best to aid the Soviet people to liberate their country.

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<sup>10</sup> Keylor, p. 181



After a couple of days, he sent his first message to Stalin, starting a personal relationship that in the future would have considerable implications for the entire course of the war. He wrote,

We are all very glad here that the Russian armies are making such a strong and spirited resistance to the utterly unprovoked and merciless invasion of the Nazis. There is general admiration of the bravery and tenacity of the soldiers and people. We shall do everything to help you that time, geography and our growing resources allow. The longer the war lasts, the more help we can give....<sup>11</sup>

It was the first step in the creation of the great war-time entity, the Grand Alliance.

### **C. THE UNION OF THE SOVIET SOCIALIST REPUBLICS**

The prewar Soviet policy was characterized as an attempt to secure the country from the growing German threat and ensure the existence of the Soviet political structure. This anxiety in the face of the German revival was quite genuine. Indeed, the relations between two states gradually deteriorated from the time Adolf Hitler took over the power. The antagonism between ideologies that the two totalitarian countries espoused was too obvious. The main message of Hitler's "Mein Kampf" bore the threat to the Bolshevik regime and indicated that the major intention of Nazi Germany was to be territorial conquest and German domination in the East, mainly at the expense of the Soviet Union. On the other hand, the Soviet Union had been in political isolation from the Western countries since the 1920s. For Soviet leaders, the West, Great Britain and France foremost, represented the force of international bourgeois imperialism in its most extreme form. Under such circumstances, Stalin faced a dilemma: to forego ideological principles and take on the co-operation with the major Western powers or stay alone in facing the increasing German military threat. The choice of the Soviet leadership was the creation of a collective security system with the West, which was quite understandable. As a first step toward this policy, the Soviet Union entered the League of Nations on September 18 1934. In 1935, the Soviet Union signed a military alliance with France, the country that was regarded as the most aggressive and militaristic of all the Western states. Non-aggression pacts were also signed with a number of neighboring countries such as

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<sup>11</sup> Churchill, Winston S., *The Second World War, The Grand Alliance, War Comes to America*, p. 6, Heron Books, 1968

Finland, Estonia, Latvia, and Poland. Communist parties from around the world received a direct order from Moscow to abandon the revolutionary struggle against world bourgeois and undertake slogans of democracy, social cooperation, and peace. At the same time Stalin, who never fully trusted his new Western strategic partners, always kept in mind the possibility of Soviet-German cooperation as a contingency option. As the famous historian Martin Malia noted,

...Stalin had no moral or ideological preference for the democracies over the fascist powers. Both were 'imperialists' mortally hostile to the Soviet Union, and someday, therefore, conflict with both was inevitable. The only question was what imperialist camp was more dangerous at any given moment; consequently, alignment with one or the other was no more than a question of expediency.<sup>12</sup>

The first real test of the effectiveness of the newly created collective security system came at the moment of the Munich crisis. As noted above, England and France were ready for all but confrontation with Hitler. The Soviet leaders clearly realized that the Soviet Union was not taken seriously as an equal partner in the collective security system when the Soviet delegation was excluded from the Munich conference at German insistence. According to renowned historian Richard Overy, recently revealed evidence indicates that the Soviet Union was determined to stand by collective security, and was even ready to fight with Nazi Germany without British and French aid if Czechs had resisted. The Czechs were given firm assurance of Soviet military support and some Soviet troops were put on alert and redeployed westward to the border. Richard Overy wrote,

When Maxim Litvinov met Ivan Maisky, the Soviet ambassador to Britain, in Geneva on September 24, he told him privately that Moscow had decided 'in earnest' on war even if France and Britain did not fight. The critical factor for Litvinov was Czech resistance: if they fight, we will fight alongside them.<sup>13</sup>

The result of the Munich crisis forced the Soviet Union to reconsider the assumptions of this foreign policy. Stalin clearly understood that both Germany and the

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<sup>12</sup> Malia, Martin, *The Soviet Tragedy, A History of Socialism in Russia, 1917-1991*, p. 280, The Free Press, New York, 1996

<sup>13</sup> Overy, Richard, *Russia's War, A History of the Soviet War Effort*, pp. 40-41, Penguin Books, 1998

Western major powers, at least temporarily, needed the Soviet Union on their side. He had the opportunity to gamble. The question was which side to take.

As noted above, there was no way that Communist Russia and Nazi Germany could become friendly countries. The ideological contradictions were too deep. Moreover, Stalin had no illusions that war between Germany and the USSR was anything but inevitable. It was in the nature of the Soviet government to assume that the first socialist state was surrounded by hostile imperialist countries, every one of which was waiting for the right moment to intervene and destroy the Soviet Union. Nazi Germany, in this regard, was the most aggressive and hostile state. Yet, political neutrality or even temporary collaboration with Germany could give the Soviet Union precious time to get ready for war. That is why, after the Czech crisis, Stalin came to seriously contemplate the possibility of rapprochement with Germany.

However, the decision of the Soviet government to change the priority in its foreign policy in favor of Germany was not simply planned in advance. Before signing official and secret pacts with Hitler, the Soviets had done all possible to create the anti-Hitler coalition. The behavior of the British and French delegations during the Anglo-French-Soviet negotiations in July-August 1939, as noted above, revealed the reluctant Anglo-French position toward creating a military alliance with the Soviet Union against Germany. Even when the Soviet government realized that the West did not regard the Soviet Union as an equal partner, it empowered the Soviet delegation to announce that the Soviet state was ready to sign any military agreement. To the astonishment of the Soviet representatives, the British and French replied that they were not authorized to sign any agreement and only could report to their governments for instructions. These facts killed off the conference and doomed the search for collective security in Europe. According to Richard Overy, these negotiations exposed the difference between the two sides, "...the Soviet Union wanted an alliance to fight Hitler, the West wanted a diplomatic front to deter him."<sup>14</sup>

The death hopes for the alliance with France and Britain was the moment when Stalin ultimately made up his mind to turn toward Germany. His intention became even

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<sup>14</sup> Overy, *Russia's War, A History of the Soviet War Effort*, p. 45

stronger when he was offered a settlement by which the Baltic countries and parts of Poland and Romania would become spheres of Soviet interests. These were former territories of Tsarist Russia, which the Soviet Union had been forced to abandon, and which it had always dreamed of bringing back. Moreover, Stalin was quite impressed by the enthusiasm and seriousness with which the Germans dealt with the Soviet Union.

The Soviet-German non-aggression pact and the complimentary secret protocol were signed in an unprecedented short time on August 23 1939. Both sides were willing to reach an agreement as soon as possible and readily made small concessions to each other. It is obvious that each totalitarian state needed this kind of agreement to satisfy their interests, and each side understood that both of them would try to take advantage of the other. The question was who benefited the most from this treaty. After the pact was signed, Stalin told then-young Politburo member Nikita Khrushchev, "I know what Hitler's up to. He thinks he has outsmarted me, but actually it is I who have outsmarted him."<sup>15</sup> But, was Stalin really so shrewd in making a bargain with Hitler?

According to the non-aggression pact, and more exactly to the secret protocol, Stalin got access to the territories of western Ukraine and Byelorussia, which were part of Poland that time, the Baltic States, and Bessarabia, then part of Romania. In addition, Stalin had a guarantee of peace, which he so desperately needed. At first glance, it might seem that Stalin gained ground from the deal with Hitler. It is true that the Soviet Union got a breathing space to prepare for war. Following the German invasion, the Soviet Union crossed the Polish border on September 17 and occupied the territories of western Ukraine and Byelorussia. Two weeks later, following the Polish defeat, the Soviet Union demanded that the Baltic States sign the treaties of mutual assistance that gave the Soviet Union the right to station troops there, and subsequently occupied them in June 1940. That same month, Soviet troops occupied Bessarabia and part of Bukovina, the territory that had not been included in the Soviet-German pact. More complicated was the situation with Finland. The Soviet Union made similar demands on Finland that it had made on Baltic States. But, contrary to the Baltic countries, Finland refused to comply, and Stalin resolved on military action. The Finish campaign turned out to be a disaster for

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<sup>15</sup> Overy, *Russia's War, A History of the Soviet War Effort*, p. 50

the Soviet Army. Despite a numerical superiority, the Red Army was faced with a furious and skillful resistance from the Finns, who used a solid set of fortifications, the so-called Mannerheim Line. In four months, the Soviet toll reached 126, 875 dead.<sup>16</sup> But worst of all was the fact that the Finnish war exposed to the rest of the world and to Germany in particular, that the real strength of the Red Army was not as menacing as it appeared. No doubt, that influenced Hitler's decision to change his focus from the Battle of Britain to the preparation for the invasion to the Soviet Union. Only after sending additional troops, including heavy tanks, and changing the military command of the operation, were the Russians able to breach the Mannerheim Line and force the Finns to sign a peace agreement. As a result, Finland gave up the territories that were demanded a year before, but at the same time preserved its independence.

All in all, by 1941 the Soviet position in Europe, gained due to the Soviet-German non-aggression pact, seemed to be solid and favorable toward Germany. The Red Army was being deployed on the newly gained territories of Eastern Europe, whereas Germany was involved in a major war with the Western democracies, which Hitler had been trying to avoid. The Soviet Union was able to continue the extension of its influence, whereas Germany had to deal with England.

Nevertheless, as it turned out, Stalin underestimated Hitler's political vision and ambitions when making the non-aggression pact. First of all, the pact guaranteed that the Soviet Union would not make any military alliance with the Western powers if they decided to fight Germany. Second, Hitler was seemingly not very concerned with the extension of the Soviet Union to the west, since he had never abandoned his intention to destroy Bolshevism and conquer living space in the east, principally at the expense of the Soviet Union.

Hitler had himself proclaimed his intention to annex parts of the Soviet Union as living space for the German race and he was deflected neither by his pact with Stalin in 1939 nor by his failure in the Battle of Britain to secure peace in the west before attacking in the east.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Overy, *Russia's War, A History of the Soviet War Effort*, p. 56

<sup>17</sup> Calvocoressi, Wint and Pritchard, p. 191

The territories he gave up to Soviets in 1939-1940, he hoped to win back later on. Moreover, the Soviet expansion to the west deprived them of their buffer zone with Germany, giving Hitler the opportunity to make a surprise attack if necessary, an attack that would have been impossible if the treaty had not been signed. Third, Stalin's agreement to supply Germany with strategic materials considerably contributed to Hitler's conquests and accelerated the invasion of the Soviet Union.

Richard Overy in his book "Russia's War" cited data of Soviet deliveries to Germany,

During the seventeenth months of the pact Germany was supplied with 865,000 tons of wood, 14,000 tons of copper, almost 1.5 million tons of grain and much more besides. In addition Soviet traders brought up materials on world markets to be transshipped to Germany, including 15,400 tons of rubber, which came via Japan. Other military assistance was granted. The German navy was given a base to use near Murmansk for refueling. Soviet icebreakers were offered to clear a way through Arctic waters for German merchant raiders, hunting down Allied sea traffic. Soviet weather ships sent back meteorological reports for the German air force during the Battle of Britain.<sup>18</sup>

Stalin's miscalculations produced his blind disbelief that Germany would venture to invade the Soviet Union before the Battle of Britain was over. Despite the countless reports of Soviet intelligence and warnings from the British and American governments about impending German invasion throughout the first half of 1941, Stalin did nothing to prepare for an enemy attack. He obviously understood that the Soviet Union was not ready for war, and the realization of his defenselessness apparently drove him to discount the possibility that the war might begin very soon. As the game between the two pseudo-allies approached a climax in June 1941, Hitler found himself in a much better position than Stalin. To put it in the words of Peter Calvocoressi, "...the Germans were getting the better of the game because they did not mind provoking the Russians, whereas the Russians were still anxious not to provoke the Germans."<sup>19</sup>

By Stalin's silent consent and stupendous disregard of countless warnings, Hitler managed to concentrate mighty striking forces near the Soviet borders and get ready for

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<sup>18</sup> Overy, *Russia's War, A History of the Soviet War Effort*, p. 53

<sup>19</sup> Calvocoressi, *Wint and Pritchard*, p. 187

the attack. In June 1941, the Germans deployed along the Russian border over 3 million men, organized into 146 army divisions, more than 2,000 aircraft, and 3,350 tanks.<sup>20</sup> In addition, and contrary to logic, Stalin moved considerable armed forces into the newly occupied territories of the Baltic countries, western Ukraine, Byelorussia, Bessarabia and Bukovina. "...by May 1941 170 Russian divisions were stationed outside the pre-1939 frontiers of the USSR."<sup>21</sup>

The German military assault of the Soviet Union on June 22 1941 overwhelmed not only the expectations of the Russians, but of the Germans themselves. The German success was complete. William Keylor in his "The Twentieth Century World" gives a comprehensive description of the situation the Soviet Union found itself in during the first months of this war,

In the first three months of battle, over half of the Soviet army were killed, wounded, or captured. Its tank force was reduced from 15,000 to 700. At the farthest extent of the German army's three-pronged advance – toward Leningrad in the North, Moscow in the center, and the Ukrainian grain fields and Caucasian oil wells in the south – almost half of Russia's industrial resources and cultivated land were under enemy control.<sup>22</sup>

Due to Stalin's huge political mistakes made during the pre-war years, underestimating Hitler's ambitions and miscalculating his intentions, the fate of the Soviet state itself was at stake. Victory or defeat in this war became a matter of survival for the Soviet government. Logically, under such circumstances, the Soviet leaders cast away their ideological principles and were ready to make agreement with any country to create a coalition against Nazi Germany and her satellites. With the critical situation in which Great Britain and the Soviet Union found themselves at the end of 1941, the creation of an anti-Hitler coalition was only a matter of time.

#### **D. THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**

American political strategy during the interwar period is known as an era of Franklin D. Roosevelt's diplomacy. The foreign policy of Roosevelt's administration during the Thirties pursued traditional goals - how to insulate the United States and

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<sup>20</sup> Overy, Russia's War, A History of the Soviet War Effort, p. 72

<sup>21</sup> Calvocoressi, Wint and Pritchard, p. 188

<sup>22</sup> Keylor, p. 182

Western Hemisphere as a whole from the European danger and at the same time how to avoid the necessity for the United States to go to war. John L. Harper, describing the principals of Franklin D. Roosevelt's policy, wrote, "...He preferred to develop 'a technique which [would] not lead to war,' or one that would produce 'the same result' as war but without having 'to go to war to get it.'"<sup>23</sup>

In analyzing European tendencies, Roosevelt saw the similarity between German and British imperialism and found a closeness of American political position with Russia. Despite a number of objections from his advisors, in particular from the chief of the Division of Eastern European Affairs of the State Department Robert F. Kelley, he established diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union in 1933. Franklin D. Roosevelt was not much experienced in Russia, and perhaps was only barely aware of what was going on in the Soviet Union during the period from the end of the Twenties and beginning of the Thirties in terms of political repressions, but these facts were not fundamental for him. He considered that national features of both Russians and Americans suggested cooperation rather than conflict, and therefore he did not take domestic Soviet communist ideology seriously. Franklin D. Roosevelt found common interests between Americans and Russians in that both countries were initially non-European, neither had colonies (in other words, neither was imperialistic), both had similar federal structure, and most importantly, their peoples were optimistic, experienced and religious, despite the anti-religious policy of the Soviet government. In addition, during the Thirties the United States never perceived Soviet Union as the communist threat that Great Britain, France, needless to say Germany, and others

European countries did. Perhaps, that can be accounted for by the remote location of the United States from the Soviet Union or the disbelief of many American officials that communist ideology had any kind of clear future.

Nevertheless, whereas the partnership with the Soviet Union was regarded as mutual cooperation, Great Britain was going to be the strategic partner. The US strategy during this period was predetermined by the relationship with Great Britain, because Great Britain, and nobody else, acted in American interests in Europe when trying to

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<sup>23</sup> Harper, p. 67



preserve the Continental balance of power. The relationship between the United States and Great Britain during the interwar years was ambivalent. On the one hand, England was the main European partner and guarantor of US security, on the other hand, many American officials, basically anti-interventionists, considered that Great Britain could be the reason for the war in Europe, and therefore disapproved of English pre-war policy. The United States was not satisfied with the conciliatory position of Britain during the Munich crisis in September 1938. In Americans eyes, the British failed to play the role of US guarantor in Europe. Analyzing British policy during and after the Munich crisis, President Roosevelt said, "What the British need today is good stiff grog, inducing not only desire to save civilization but the confirmed belief that they can do it. In such an event they will have a lot more support from their American cousins."<sup>24</sup>

An even more severe reaction to British policy took place in the United States after Stalin and Hitler had signed the German-Soviet nonaggression accord in August 1939. American officials considered that the Soviet-German treaty was a result of British failure to find a dialogue with the Russians. Harold L. Ickes, in regard to the German-Soviet nonaggression pact, wrote, "I entertain no doubt that England could have concluded a satisfactory treaty with Russia month ago or even year ago.... The situation today is the perfect flower of a course of British diplomacy that traced from Sir John Simon through Baldwin to Chamberlain"<sup>25</sup> In his turn, Franklin D. Roosevelt remarked, "The wealthy class of England is so afraid of communism, which has constituted no threat at all to England, that they have thrown themselves into the arms of Nazism and now they don't know which way to turn."<sup>26</sup>

The outbreak of the Second World War brought about new visions and political strategy among the American political elite. The US grand strategy during World War II was an issue of fervent discussions and disputes within the United States government as well as between the US and its allies. On the one hand, from the very beginning of World War II, President Roosevelt was strongly convinced that sooner or later the United States would formally participate in war against Nazi Germany. As John L. Harper remarked in

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<sup>24</sup> Harper, p. 62

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 62

<sup>26</sup> Harper, pp. 62-63

his book, “It will never be known for sure when - or even if - before December 7, 1941, Roosevelt became convinced that America’s formal participation in the war was necessary and inevitable.”<sup>27</sup> On the other hand, the American public was deeply effected by the idea of “isolationism” or “anti-interventionism.” In other words, there were a large number of high-level officials who opposed the intention of Franklin Roosevelt, and even the very idea, of military intervention in Europe on the side of Allies. The existence of a strong anti-interventionist movement in America had objective roots. Many believed that the United States should not enter the war under any circumstance because the fate of Europe had already been predetermined. In 1939, despite the stunning success of Germany in Poland, many American political and military analysts thought that the Allies would win the war. There were a number of reasons to think so. First of all, the French army was the biggest in the world. France could put three soldiers in the field for every one that Germany could deploy. Moreover, many felt that the French had not only the largest army in the world, but also the most trained and effective. Secondly, British naval power was undisputed. German submarines lacked bases on the Atlantic, and therefore could not be very effective. The balance of air power was in question, but many experts were confident that the Allies had sufficient air power to destroy German factories, thereby depriving Hitler of the means to continue the war.

Another anti-interventionists argument against direct US involvement was that the war aims of the Allies did not much differ from those of the Germans. Anti-interventionists felt that Great Britain and France, as well as Germany, pursued purely imperialistic goals, as shown by the demands of each combatant for land, food, and raw materials. Many considered Great Britain as fighting not for Poland, not for the free world, but for preservation of her own Imperial position. In other words, Great Britain strove to maintain her supremacy and prevent Nazi Germany from gaining the position of dominant power. Anti-interventionists held to the idea that Europe would never stop fighting. Europe was doomed to fight and everyone could be convinced of that merely by looking at what was going on in Europe. The famous American aviator Charles A. Lindberg said, “The history of Europe has always been interwoven with conflict.

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<sup>27</sup> . Harper, p. 73

Experience would warn us to be surprised if much more time had passed without war.”<sup>28</sup> In short, the idea was that the United States was not able to change the nature of Europe, and therefore should not intervene on the side of the Allies under any circumstances.

Faced with so strong an opposition from anti-interventionists, President Franklin D. Roosevelt and the advisors who were on his side, had to develop a flexible strategy to aid the Allies, and at the same time to accommodate the wide-spread anti-interventionist public opinion, especially since the president faced a re-election campaign in 1940. The first step was made in September 1939 when President Roosevelt in addressing to Congress proposed a repeal of the arms embargo. He suggested that buyers of American goods take possession of the items before leaving the United States, and transport them in foreign vessels. By doing so, President Roosevelt hoped to help the Allies by all means he could, and at the same time to keep the United States from participating in the war. This policy was called “Cash and Carry.” Despite fierce anti-interventionist resistance, Roosevelt’s proposal passed the Senate on October 27, 1939. Yet, the repeal of the arms embargo did not have quite so much effect as Roosevelt’s government hoped. At that time, Great Britain had the ability to produce planes and other armaments more quickly than the United States, and therefore did not need American weapons urgently. Justus D. Doenecke wrote, “For Neville Chamberlain, the repeal of the arms embargo lay more in its negative effect on German morale than on any actual armaments Britain found itself needing.”<sup>29</sup> The British attitude towards American aid changed in 1940, after Great Britain was defeated in Narvik and France fell as a result of the brilliant German attack. Although the British managed to evacuate almost 340,000 British and French troops to the Britain, the defeat was overwhelming. The Narvik fiasco led to a change of British leadership. On May 10 1940, Winston Churchill was appointed as a new Prime Minister. He soon had to tell President Roosevelt that Britain had suffered heavy losses and soon would not be able to buy the American arms that Britain now needed as never before. At the same time, a newly formed French Vichy government (which was legitimate only on one-third of French territory in southern France) showed signs of collaboration with Nazi

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<sup>28</sup> Doenecke, Justus, *Storm of the Horizon, The Challenge to American Intervention, 1939-1941*, p. 29, Roman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., Lanham, Boulder, New York, Oxford, 2000

<sup>29</sup> Doenecke, p. 67

Germany. Despite the fact that the United States maintained diplomatic relations with the Vichy government until the Americans conducted military operations in North Africa in 1942, President Roosevelt publicly warned the Vichy government against collaboration and was concerned about the fate of the French fleet, which could fall into Nazi hands.

These factors Prompted president Roosevelt to reconsider “Cash and Carry” policy. Roosevelt’s administration developed a plan whereby the United States itself would be able to lease or sell anything that the British would need. In arguing Senate passage of this bill, President Roosevelt argued that Great Britain alone resisted an enemy who strove for world domination. He said that if England fell, “the Axis powers will control the continents of Europe, Asia, Africa, Australia, and the high seas - and they will be in a position to bring enormous military and naval resources against this hemisphere.”

<sup>30</sup> Again, despite strong anti-interventionist opposition, the Senate passed the Lend-Lease bill in March 1941. Initially, Lend-Lease program was not that effective. Throughout 1941, Great Britain received only one percent of its munitions through the program. Nevertheless, Lend-Lease went on to play considerable role in the victory over Nazi Germany, giving \$31 billion in supplies to Great Britain and \$11 billion to the Soviet Union.

Despite appreciable efforts to provide military aid to Great Britain, during 1941 the Roosevelt administration concentrated on hemispheric defense. After the fall of France, nobody in the United States, including President Roosevelt, was certain that Great Britain would withstand possible German attack. That is why Roosevelt administration foresaw a possible open warfare against the United States and Latin America from Germany in coordination with Japan. Historian David Haglund wrote,

In those dark days of late May and early June 1940, the consensus of the administration was that England - brave as it might be - must be finished and that the United States might shortly be fighting the battle of its life in Latin America. This was not a prospect that pleased him, yet Roosevelt accepted it as a probable, if gloomy scenario.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Doenecke , p. 166

<sup>31</sup> Doenecke, p. 129

The ultimate decision of President Franklin D. Roosevelt to enter the war against Nazi Germany was made after the Germans attacked the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941. There are several explanations why he made his decision after this event. One of them is that Roosevelt believed that if the Soviet Union was destroyed, Nazi Germany would be able to turn all its might against the Western Allies, and then the United States would have to spend more resources and lose more American lives to achieve eventual Allied victory. Moreover, personally, Roosevelt could not countenance that the war would be won only at the expense of Russian and English blood. He knew that the United States would have to pay a certain price for common victory. Finally, Roosevelt understood that the United State would not be able to influence the postwar political order in Europe if the country did not play an important role on the battlefield, and that could not be possible without the participation of American troops in the European theatre.

The US attitude towards the Soviet Union was ambivalent. There was a widespread opinion among certain political groups that considered Stalin to be more evil than Hitler. Political repression in the Soviet Union, persecution of religion and church, the purge of the Red Army and Soviet government and many others factors played their role in the formation of a negative public opinion in the United States. Many compared Germany and the Soviet Union saying that Germany was the more tolerant country since the German people could go to church, German Jews had been allowed to leave the country instead of being shot, and that Stalin had repressed far more people than had Hitler. The Nazi-Soviet nonaggression pact and Soviet aggression against Finland just aggravated the opinion of the American public toward the Soviet Union. That is why when the Soviet Union underwent German attack on June 22, 1941, few considered that the Soviets would be one of the main allies of the United States in the Second World War. Some officials were even satisfied with the development of events, because two evil empires, in the eyes of Americans, were destroying each other. According to Congressman Roy Woodruff, the more damage the German and Russian armies did to each other, “the safer the world of free and honest men and women and children will be.”<sup>32</sup> Senator Harry Truman, in his turn, said, “If we see that Germany is winning we ought to help Russia, and if Russia is winning we ought to help Germany, and that way

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<sup>32</sup> Doenecke, p. 217

let them kill as many as possible, although I don't want to see Hitler victorious under any circumstances.”<sup>33</sup> The personal attitude of Franklin D. Roosevelt toward the Soviet Union was more or less favorable. This was basically because he felt that communism was not a big threat both to Europe and especially not to the United States.

The German attack on the Soviet Union was so overwhelming that even President Roosevelt was not certain whether or not the Soviet Union would withstand the attack and whether or not it was worth giving the Soviets some military help. To be sure, he authorized his leading adviser Harry Hopkins to visit Moscow, and to assess the prospects of Soviet Union survival. President Roosevelt was impressed when he learned from Hopkins's report that despite huge losses and heavy casualties, the spirit of the Red Army was extremely high, and that with American help the Russians would be quite able to stop the German armies. This news prompted President Roosevelt to send to Congress a supplementary Lend-Lease bill that included aid to the Soviet Union. The bill passed the House of Representatives and Senate on October 10, 1941. Advocating the necessity of giving aid to the Russians, Franklin D. Roosevelt faced furious anti-interventionist opposition. American anti-interventionist #1, Charles Lindberg, a well-known German sympathizer, said, “I would a hundred times rather see my country ally herself with England, or even with Germany with all her faults, than with the cruelty, the Godlessness, and the barbarism that exists in Soviet Russia.”<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless, President Roosevelt and his followers were resolute in their intention to provide all possible help to both Great Britain and the Soviet Union while remaining disengaged from the battlefield. It was a first step for President Roosevelt toward the creation of a grand strategy of the Allies against Nazi Germany. The United State was not yet a belligerent country, but it definitely was a country that struggled against fascism.

Japan's attack on the American naval base at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 was a tactical surprise to the United States. It goes without saying that the United States anticipated conflict with Japan, but not at that time and not at Pearl Harbor. Many American officials thought that in the winter of 1941, Japan would rather attack the

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<sup>33</sup> Doenecke, p. 217

<sup>34</sup> Doenecke, p. 219

Soviet Far East than the US naval base in Hawaii. Soon thereafter, Nazi Germany declared war against the United States and America became a belligerent nation.

Despite the fact that by the spring of 1942, almost all of East Asia had come under Japanese domination, President Roosevelt made a historic decision that the European theater should be given priority in American war strategy. The main reason that convinced him to do that was his deep conviction that Germany's defeat would doom Japan. Logically, under such circumstances, the Soviet Union was going to be regarded as a legitimate military ally. There was not an official memorandum of military alliance among the countries fighting against Nazi Germany, but the creation of an anti-Hitler coalition was inevitable.

The historical phenomenon of creating the anti-Hitler coalition during the Second World War was not a product of coincidental circumstances, but rather a logical result of the pre-war policies conducted by Great Britain, the Soviet Union, and the United States of America. The result of their policies led to the situation where Nazi Germany became a master of almost all continental Europe and constituted the force capable of destroying every belligerent nation or at least ending the war on its own terms. Under such circumstances, the unification of efforts of such fundamentally different societies as the Western Democracies and the Soviet Union became an extreme necessity and the creation of the anti-Hitler coalition was only a matter of time.

Inter-Allied cooperation during the war years was a very complicated process, the main result of which was the opening of the Second Front in Europe. The next chapter deals with the grand strategies and civil-military relations of the Western Allies and USSR that eventually led to the massive cross-channel military operation in June 1944.

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### **III. THE SECOND FRONT AS A RESULT OF GRAND STRATEGIES AND CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS OF WESTERN ALLIES AND USSR DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR.**

Inter-allied cooperation during the Second World War can be characterized as the clash of different politico-military approaches to attaining a primary objective. Each of the Allied countries, Great Britain, the United States and the Soviet Union, had as the common goal the destruction of Nazi Germany, but at the same time each of them pursued its own geo-political interests, and therefore had distinct and peculiar grand strategies. Each of the grand strategies, in turn, stemmed from different historical heritages, civil-military relations and political structures that often made the cooperation among the Allies complicated and uneven, and at times even suspicious.

The opening of the Second Front in Europe in June 1944 by the massive cross-channel operation in northern France marked the highest point of development in relations between the Western Allies and the Soviet Union, and at the same time the starting point for the deterioration and eventual breakdown of this relationship. It can be said that the “Second Front” issue had been the pivotal question in building Allied strategy from the time the anti-Hitler coalition was created till the very moment of the invasion of Normandy. The opening of the Second Front in Northern Europe deprived the Germans of any chance of revival. There was no longer any hope for the Nazi leaders, not counting Hitler’s maniacal belief in final victory, that Germany would be able to prevail over numerically and materially superior adversaries while fighting a two-front war. Yet, until this moment, the hope that Germany would be able, if not to win the war, then to end fighting on acceptable terms, was quite alive among many members of the German high command.

According to Richard Overy, the Allies were able to win the Second World War because they created material superiority over the Axis powers. “Alliance between the British Empire, the Soviet Union and the United States created overwhelming superiority in manpower and resources. If there is any consensus about why the Allies won, it rests on the unassailable evidence that one side vastly outnumbered and outproduced the

other.”<sup>35</sup> He also noted that the Axis powers were favored by the material balance up to 1942. “Up to 1942 the balance favored the aggressor and might well allow them to win before American economic power could be placed in the scales.”<sup>36</sup> But after that, due to the unprecedented speed of the American rearmament and revival of the Soviet economy, the balance of resources swung in favor of the Allies. Richard Overy wrote,

By 1943 the material gulf was huge. That year the Axis produced 43,000 aircraft; the Allies produced 151,000. The temptation has always been that to assume that figures speak for themselves. The balance of populations and raw materials greatly favoured the Allies: hence whatever the Axis powers did they would always come up against the strategic dead end of material inferiority.<sup>37</sup>

However, the considerable material superiority by 1943 did not allow Allies to finish the war earlier than May 1945. Nor did this factor help them open the Second Front in Europe, which had been a subject of desperate Russian pleas since June 1941, earlier than in June 1944. Given these facts, it might be easily assumed that there were serious reasons preventing the Allies from opening the Second Front in Europe before June 1944. There is no doubt that the opening of the Second Front in Europe was the result of the grand strategies Great Britain, the United States and the Soviet Union carried out in the course of the Second World War. This study argues that the differences in grand strategies that each of the Allied countries adhered to played the main role in the decision of the Western Allies to postpone the large-scale military operation in the northwestern Europe until June 1944.

**The incompatibility of visions and approaches on the ways of how the war might be and should be won among the Allied countries precluded the opening of the Second Front in northwestern Europe until June 1944.**

It is accepted that political leaders from time to time might change the directions of their strategies in order to achieve more vital objectives or find a compromise with an opponent. The opening of the Second Front in Europe became possible after every member of the “Grand Alliance” gave up some of their principles and aligned their

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<sup>35</sup> Overy, Richard, *Why the Allies Won*, p. 2, W W Norton & Company, New York, London, 1996

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 4

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 2

strategies thereby forging a global strategy against Nazism. Once the common goal, the destruction of Nazi Germany, had been achieved, they diverged again.

**A. IMAGINARY AND REAL REASONS FOR THE POSTPONEMENT OF THE SECOND FRONT**

There has existed a theory, fervently advocated by Soviet historiography, that the Western Allies were reluctant to open the Second Front in Europe due to their desire for the Soviet Union to fight the bulk of the German armed forces alone, so that the two hostile countries would exhaust each other and the Western powers could then establish their domination in Europe at a little cost. William R. Keylor, in this regard, wrote,

Defenders of the Soviet Union have detected a cynical motive behind this Anglo-American hesitation, namely, the desire to see Russia bled white while her Western allies conserved their military and economic resources in order to step in at the last moment to replace defeated Germany and preempt exhausted Russia as a dominant power on the continent.<sup>38</sup>

The development of the historical events indicates that it is hardly true.

First of all, although the main burden of fighting the German army lay on Russia's shoulders, the Western Allies were in a difficult situation as well. Britain was still being bombed heavily. Her troops were in action in North Africa and she had the burden of organizing and carrying out the northern convoys of British and American supplies to Russia in accordance with the Lend-Lease program. The United States, literally, was involved in the war on two sides, in the Pacific and European theaters, and was making tremendous efforts in rearmament and mobilizing resources. Under such circumstances, neither of the Western allies could remain militarily inactive and focused on conserving their military and economic resources.

Secondly, the unwillingness to open the Second Front could always plant the seeds of a separate peace between Stalin and Hitler. Both, the British and Americans clearly understood that sooner or later they would have to do something to relieve the pressure from the Russians, and that the postponement of the Second Front in Europe would only increase the possibility of a separate peace.

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<sup>38</sup> Keylor, p. 185

Finally, both Britain and America clearly understood that the victory in this war depended on the survival of the Soviet Union. “The whole question of whether we win or lose the war depends on the Russians,”<sup>39</sup> said President Roosevelt in the late summer of 1942, probably the most difficult time for the Soviet troops. This situation required the maximum possible assistance of all kinds, and not a hesitation to conduct military operations in the Western Europe. That is why it would be insane for the British and Americans to risk losing the war by waiting for the last moment to step in.

In summary, the statement that the Western Allies were waiting for the right moment to launch large-scale military operations in Western Europe is not very convincing because the Western Allies needed the Second Front as much as did the Soviet Union. The postponement of the cross-channel operation until June 1944 was anything, but an attempt to win the war at the expense of the Soviet Union.

The development of events during the Second World War indicates that the opening of the Second Front in northern France was opened in June 1944 mainly because of the following reasons:

- The differences in strategic approach to conducting a large-scale military operation in Europe between Great Britain and the United States, which entailed lengthy strategic debate and, as a result, the postponement of the operation until June 1944;
- Insufficient means and forces, especially on the American side, for conducting amphibious operations prior to June 1944;
- The considerable improvement in the tactical performance of the Red Army, the growing capability of the Soviet Union to destroy Germany even without Allied military assistance and, as result, the possible Soviet domination of Europe.

## **B. THE SOVIET DEMANDS AND ANGLO-AMERICAN REACTIONS**

The Soviet pressure on the Western allies for the establishment of a Second Front in Europe began from the very moment the Soviet Union was involved in the Second World War. Indeed, in his first communication to Churchill on July 18, 1941, which was in answer to the first message from the Prime Minister, and in which he was trying to break the ice and to establish both personal and official relationships, Stalin wrote,

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<sup>39</sup> Stoler, Mark A., *Allies and Adversaries, The Joint Chiefs of Staff, The Grand Alliance, and U.S. Strategy in World War II*, p. 85, The University of North Carolina Press, 2000

Perhaps it is not out of place to mention that the position of the Soviet forces at the front remains tense. The consequences of the unexpected breach of the Non-Aggression Pact by Hitler, as well as of the sudden attack against the Soviet Union – both facts bringing advantages to the German troops – still remain to be felt by the Soviet armies.

It seems to me therefore that the military situation of the Soviet Union, as well as of Great Britain, would be considerably improved if there could be established a front against Hitler in the West – northern France, and in the North – the Arctic.

A front in northern France could not only divert Hitler's forces from the East, but at the same time would make it impossible for the Hitler to invade Britain. The establishment of the front just mentioned would be popular with the British Army, as well as with the whole population of the southern England. I fully realize the difficulties involved with the establishment of such a front. I believe however that in spite of the difficulties it should be formed not only in the interests of our common cause, but also in the interests of Great Britain herself. This is the most propitious moment for the establishment of such a front, because now Hitler's forces are diverted to the East and he has not yet had a chance to consolidate the position occupied by him in the East.

It is still easier to establish a front in the North. Here, on the part of Great Britain, would be necessary only naval and air operations, without the landing of troops or artillery. The Soviet military, naval and air forces would take part in such an operation. We would welcome it if Great Britain could transfer to this theater of war something like one light division or more of the Norwegian volunteers, who could be used in Northern Norway to organize rebellion against the Germans.<sup>40</sup>

Churchill's first reaction to the Soviet appeal was resentment toward the unconcealed Soviet demand to open the Second Front right away after almost two years of collaboration with Hitler. From Churchill's perspective, the real Second Front was the one Stalin abandoned in August 1939 by making a non-aggression pact with Germany. From that time up to June 1941, the Soviet Government had watched the destruction of this front in France and in the air over Britain and had done nothing but assisted Germany in some minor ways. All that time, the Great Britain remained alone facing the full strength of the German army and, as a result, its resources by June 1941 were quite limited. Churchill tried to remind Stalin about that in the most comprehensive terms,

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<sup>40</sup> Churchill, *The Second World War, The Grand Alliance, War Comes to America*, pp. 8-9

You must remember that we have been fighting alone for more than a year, and that, though our resources are growing, and will grow fast from now on, we are at the utmost strain both at home and in the Middle East by land and air, and also that a Battle of the Atlantic, on which our life depends, and the movement of all our convoys in the teeth of the U-boat and Fokke-Wulf blockade, strains our naval resources, great though they be, to the utmost limit.<sup>41</sup>

The first reaction from the American side was ambivalence. On the one hand, President Roosevelt insisted on immediate military aid to Russia. On the other hand, the President and his followers faced not only anti-interventionist opposition, but also the negative assessment of military experts as to the wisdom of sending military aid to Russia. This assessment was made on the grounds that the Soviet Union would not be able to withstand the German onslaught, and therefore that military help of any kind would not be vindicated. Mark Stoler, in his book “Allies and Adversaries,” in this regard, wrote, “Two days after the initiation of BARBAROSSA Stimson informed Roosevelt...that Germany would be preoccupied with conquering Russia for no less than one but no more than three months...”<sup>42</sup>

Yet, despite all the negative assessments and predictions, both the British and American governments realized the fact that the German invasion of Russia dramatically altered the values and relationships of the war. The Soviet Union, with its huge natural resources and manpower, was the country that had the potential to stop Nazi advancement and create the preconditions for a successful land offensive against Germany. Mark Stoler wrote that, “As early as June 26 the president had predicted that if the eastern front proved to be more than a temporary “diversion,” it would “mean the liberation of Europe from Nazi domination” – a clear recognition of Soviet potential to alter dramatically the shape and outcome of the war against Germany.”<sup>43</sup> Winston Churchill, in turn, said, “...we rejoiced to have this mighty nation (USSR) in the battle

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<sup>41</sup> Churchill, *The Second World War, The Grand Alliance, War Comes to America*, p. 10

<sup>42</sup> Stoler, p. 51

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53

with us, and we all felt that even if the Soviet armies were driven back to the Ural Mountains Russia would still exert an immense and, if she preserved in the war, an ultimately decisive force.”<sup>44</sup>

This attitude toward the Soviet Union was reinforced in the late summer and early fall of 1941, when the development of events on the Eastern Front gave some indications that the Soviet country would be able to survive the German attack and be the essential factor in victory over Germany. According to Mark Stoler, a number of prominent American officials, such as leading advisor Harry Hopkins, former ambassador to the Soviet Union Joseph Davies, former military attaché Colonel Philip Faymonlill, “apparently convinced the president by midsummer that the odds favored Russian survival, at least into 1942.”<sup>45</sup>

This early recognition of the Western Allies that the Soviet Union would be the decisive force in fighting Germany shaped their strategies toward the following war years. From now on, the main direction of the Allied strategy became rendering all-possible aid to the Soviet Union in order to support and extend the Eastern Front so as to keep the Germans tied down in the Soviet Union until the Allies were ready to conduct large-scale land operations on the European continent.

Thus, in the eyes of Britain and the United States the necessity of all around help to the Soviet Union was beyond question even in 1941. The question was in which ways this help could be provided. The first and most obvious assistance was to be the material supply of the Soviet Union with resources, ammunition, and weapons in accordance with the Lend-Lease program. As noted above, the US House of Representatives and Senate endorsed the Lend-Lease aid to the USSR on October 10, 1941. The British, in turn, committed themselves to providing arctic convoys to Russia right after the June 22 invasion. But, what is remarkable is that some US military authorities were ready to go much farther. Mark Stoler, in this regard, wrote, “One G-2 officer..., arguing that material aid was insufficient and that Russian collapse could and should be averted by the creation of an immediate ‘diversion front’ in northern France which could also serve as a

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<sup>44</sup> Churchill, *The Second World War, The Grand Alliance, War Comes to America*, p. 18

<sup>45</sup> Stoler, p. 53

base for future continental operations.”<sup>46</sup> It was the first US military call for a Second Front, but it could hardly be the touchstone of the US strategy at that time. But, at the same time, it was a clear indication that in addition to material supplies, US military authorities seriously contemplated aid to the Soviet Union in the form of direct military action against Germany to relieve Soviet forces from the German onslaught, and that the most effective military action would be rendered nowhere but in the northwestern Europe. Although anti-interventionist attitude among the American political elite was still high, and President Roosevelt was not yet an adherent of direct military adventure in Europe, more and more military authorities of high ranks insisted that Britain and Russia alone were not able to defeat Germany, and that someday the United States would have to undertake some kind of military action. Mark Stoler wrote,

On September 22 (1941) Marshall bluntly informed the president that “Germany cannot be defeated by supply of munitions to friendly powers, and air and naval operations alone. Large ground forces will be required” – enough to counter four hundred German divisions dominating Europe from the “Urals to Iberian Peninsula and from Scandinavia to North Africa.”<sup>47</sup>

### **C. TWO DIFFERENT STRATEGIC APPROACHES**

The first decision of the Western Allies to launch offensive against Germany in the European theater was made during the Arcadia conference, the Anglo-American summit held in Washington in December 1941- January 1942, where the Allies tried to produce an agreed-upon global strategy against Nazi Germany. Given the difficult situation on the Eastern Front, both sides believed that some kind of offensive action in the European theater was mandatory in 1942. One of the agreements reached during this conference between Britain and the United States was to conduct an offensive against German forces in French North Africa in 1942 in order to clear the Mediterranean and prepare for the offensive operation on the European continent in 1943. Nevertheless, given the fact that Axis naval forces challenged control of the Atlantic and Vichy France remained hostile, London and Washington soon had to postpone the invasion of French North Africa, which was to be called Operation Gymnast. This postponement entailed

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<sup>46</sup> Stoler, p. 54

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 57



strategic debate between Britain and the United States over what kind of offensive operation should be undertaken in 1942, and that revealed deep differences in strategic approaches and visions of waging the war in the European theater.

The British were devoted to the so-called peripheral strategy or indirect warfare, which can be briefly described as avoiding in decisive battles, exhausting the enemy by bombardment and in peripheral theaters, and engaging in a decisive battle only at the most suitable moment.

Great Britain, being a sea power, not having a large army, and having suffered mass casualties during the First World War in 1914-1918, did not believe in engaging the enemy in a decisive battle in the field. Hence, the British approach to making grand strategy was quite different from those countries having big manpower resources. Michael Howard, in this regard, invoked the words of Chester Wilmot:

The British...have never been numerically strong enough in war to proceed on the basis of riding rough-shod over the enemy. They have had to win their campaigns by maneuver, not by mass...they knew from long experience of European wars that would-be invaders must first exploit the great mobility which sea-power (and now air-power) gave them, in order to keep the enemy dispersed and to counter his natural advantage of being able to move on interior lines.<sup>48</sup>

A large and capable Navy has always been the British main weapon in previous wars. The Royal Navy allowed the British to make various maneuvers, harass enemy coasts, and bring help to continental troops. Navy flexibility gave the British the opportunity to disperse enemy troops and determine the weakest links in enemy dispositions. Yet, all these advantages would be effective only under one important condition. The British should have a reliable ally, strong enough to engage the enemy in the decisive battle on land. The composition of flexible sea power and a strong land force (plus capable air power) would be ideal means, in British minds, to inflict defeat on any adversary.

Yet, in fact, the reality was that soon after the outbreak of the Second World War, the British had neither a reliable strong ally nor a capable Navy. The sole ally France, which at that time had the largest land army in Europe, collapsed under the German

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<sup>48</sup> Howard, p. 1

lightning attack in June 1940. The British land army was not large, and was not comparable to the more skilful and experienced Wehrmacht. Yet, not only a small land army made Britain vulnerable. Even its main military means, the British fleet did not give the country advantages of sea power as it had before. Technological innovations and advances led to the situation where in the middle of the twentieth century sea power lost some of the advantages it had enjoyed during previous military conflicts. That loss was attributable, first of all, to the emergence and rapid development of another maneuverable and flexible means - air power. Under these circumstances, the movements of huge armadas of battleships, aircraft carriers and escorts were difficult to conceal. In addition, they became easy targets for attacks from the air. Besides, the fleet partially lost its capacity to disperse enemy forces. Using the developed infrastructure of roads and rail, land forces now enjoyed a similar flexibility to navies, and could be rapidly transferred from one point to another, depending on the situation in the field. Thus, the British fleet could not offset the small land army and the lack of a reliable strong ally. These were the conditions the British faced during the Second World War.

The best solution for Britain in this situation would be, obviously, not to engage in decisive battles and to use all available land forces, sea power, and air power to build up its own strength and damage that of the enemy as much as possible. By doing so, the British supposed, Britain would induce the collapse of the German empire from within. Bombardment, in their estimation, would paralyze German access to its sources of oil. Resistance fighters in occupied territories, watching the general deterioration of German power, would rise in revolt. These factors would render the Germans unable to continue fighting whereupon the British Army, by that time strong enough, would be able to enter the continent to accept German surrender. Meanwhile, Britain should fight in "...a subsidiary theater where British forces could be employed to harass the enemy and perhaps inflict serious damage."<sup>49</sup>

These were the main pillars of British strategy. The thing left to decide was where, in what theater, this strategy should be implemented. The global politico-military environment at the beginning of 1942 gave reasons to assume that the most vital theater

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<sup>49</sup> Howard, p. 9

where British forces could more or less successfully oppose German armies would be the Middle East. First of all, the Middle East was the place where forces from all parts of the British Commonwealth could be most easily concentrated. That did not apply to Canada, but forces from India, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, and Great Britain itself, could be brought to the action via sea or air-routes. Secondly, the nearby Balkans was the only region where the British could inflict direct and considerable damage to the enemy. All German military might was dependent on oil. The Romanian oil installation around Ploesti was an indispensable source for the functioning of the German military machine. The concentration of considerable armed forces in the Middle East would constitute not only a big threat to German troops in the Middle East and Balkans, but also could prevent Romanian oil from reaching Germany. Finally, the Middle East was an area of great importance to Britain because it was the main source of oil for British troops. Based on these circumstances, after several weeks of postponement of Operation Gymnast, Churchill suggested a return to the decision to invade French North Africa in 1942.

The United States of America, a country with huge natural, material and manpower resources, was for its part inclined to undertake a different kind of strategic approach – engaging in decisive battle with the enemy in order to achieve the ultimate objective. In the words of Michael Howard, the main principles of the American strategy were to, “...mobilize the greatest possible resources, concentrate them as quickly as possible at the decisive point, and there engage in battle to settle the matter.”<sup>50</sup> The American military authorities, therefore, were occupied with the question of how to mobilize the resources and where the decisive engagement should occur. Given that the most problematic task for the United States was keeping Russia in the war, the American military planners, General Eisenhower in particular, came to the conclusion that the most necessary and effective military action in 1942 would be a cross-channel invasion of northern France in order to force the Germans to shift considerable forces from the Eastern Front thereby relieving the Russians from the German pressure and precluding the possibility of a separate peace between Stalin and Hitler. They contended that only in

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<sup>50</sup> Howard, p. 21

northern France could the Allies launch the decisive offensive, and that this offensive could be successful because the bulk of the German army was involved in Russia. General Eisenhower said,

We've got to go to Europe and fight – and we've got to quit wasting resources all over the world – and still worse – wasting time. If we're to keep Russia in, save the Middle East, India and Burma, we've got to begin slugging with air at West Europe; to be followed by a land attack as soon as possible.<sup>51</sup>

Yet, despite the intentions of the American military planners to conduct cross-channel operations as soon as possible, the reality of the global politico-military environment did not allow them to carry out such a military endeavor in 1942. The United States simply did not have sufficient troops in the European theater, and American rearmament had not been finished. That is why the ultimate American proposal for military action in 1942 was immediate concentration of forces in Britain of 48 divisions (Operation Bolero), for a cross-channel attack in the spring of 1943 (Operation Round-Up), with provisions for a much smaller, 'emergency' operation in the summer or fall of 1942 with whatever forces were then available (Operation Sledgehammer) should Germany be 'critically weakened' or the Soviet situation turn desperate.<sup>52</sup>

#### **D. BEGINNING OF THE GREAT STRATEGIC DEBATE AND CRUCIAL DECISION FOR OPERATION “TORCH” (JANUARY 1942- DECEMBER 1942)**

The deep Anglo-American differences in building strategies for the European theater caused the great strategic debate, which precluded the opening of the Second Front in Europe until the summer of 1944.

Despite the fact that the American proposal proposed a cross-channel attack in the spring of 1943, many American high-level authorities, specifically Generals Marshall and Eisenhower, insisted that this kind of military operation be conducted in 1942 (Operation Sledgehammer). The great risk, that this operation promised, would in their opinion be justified because the operation “...would be launched to maintain Soviet resistance in a

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<sup>51</sup> Howard, p. 21

<sup>52</sup> Stoler, p. 77

desperate situation by diverting German forces, and because such resistance remained ‘essential’ to the defeat of Germany.”<sup>53</sup> US Joint Staff Planners substantiated the necessity of conducting cross-channel operations in 1942 by several lines of reason.

First of all, this kind of operation would keep the huge Russian army in the war and preclude the possibility of the separate peace between Germany and the Soviet Union.

Second, even if Sledgehammer was not to be a large-scale operation, it would have a huge psychological effect on the Russians, especially given the fact that President Roosevelt had promised Molotov to open the Second Front that year, during Molotov’s visit to Washington in May 1942.<sup>54</sup> Besides, it was well known that in Stalin’s eyes the Second Front meant specifically an invasion of northwestern France by cross-channel assault.

Finally, American planners believed that Operation Gymnast would not be of any direct help to Russia and therefore would not be decisive, while at the same time dispersing Anglo-American forces and making it impossible to carry out both Sledgehammer in 1942 and Round-Up in 1943. That would mean abandoning the Soviets for at least two years, thereby accepting the possibility of Soviet defeat and making the war unwinnable.

In addition, the British adherence to peripheral strategy induced a huge opposition among American military planners since they thought that by promoting Gymnast, the British strove above all else to defend their imperial interests, and only after that to accomplish necessary war objectives. Michael Howard, in this regard, wrote,

The US Army Planning Staff drew a sharp distinction between the United Kingdom itself, which they were prepared to defend, and ‘British interests’ – particularly British imperial interests – which they were not...They did not want to become drawn into protecting British possessions and interests, either in the Far East or in the Middle East, and

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<sup>53</sup> Stoler, p. 76

<sup>54</sup> Harper, p. 82

operations which derived their rationale from Britain's position in the latter theatre awoke their suspicions. Operations in the Middle East and the Balkans were thus particularly suspect to them.<sup>55</sup>

The British, of course, had a totally different perspective. For Churchill French North Africa was still the European theater, and in his viewpoint Operation Gymnast could constitute the only possible "Second Front" in 1942. Contrary to the American proposal, the British gave the following reasons why the invasion of North Africa should prevail over a cross-channel operation in 1942.

First of all, they were convinced that in 1942 Operation Sledgehammer could not be launched on a sufficient level under any circumstances. Their point was that the British and Americans not only suffered from insufficient land and naval forces, but also a lack of air superiority, which was indispensable for conducting cross-channel operations. In Churchill's eyes, conducting the cross channel attack in 1942 would be paramount to committing suicide.

Second, the British were certain that Operation Sledgehammer would not divert considerable German forces from the Eastern Front, and therefore would not render the Russians any kind of meaningful aid. Operation Gymnast, on the other hand, would divert German forces from France, and possibly even from the Eastern Front in order to secure Italy and the Balkans. That would create favorable preconditions for conducting an offensive operation in German-dominated Europe (Round-Up) in 1943.

Finally, Churchill insisted that Operation Gymnast would by no means preclude Operation Round-Up. On the contrary, he asserted that only Gymnast would make it possible for Round-Up in 1943, whereas Sledgehammer would definitely doom it. He did not regard Round-Up as necessarily a cross-channel operation, although that was possible, and considered that Gymnast would deliver nothing but advantages and would facilitate Round-Up's implementation. Carrying out Sledgehammer would, on the other hand, in and of itself negate Round-Up. Getting ready for a meeting with American military authorities in July 1942, Churchill wrote in his notes,

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<sup>55</sup> Howard, p. 24

We are ardently in favor of 'Round-Up'. But here again what is 'Round-Up?' Is it necessary confined to the attack upon the western seaboard of France? Is the idea of the second front necessarily confined within those limits? Might it not be extended even more widely, and with advantage? We have been inclined to think that 'Sledgehammer' might delay or even preclude 'Round-Up'.<sup>56</sup>

In addition to this, the British had no doubts that, in the event of Russian collapse, Sledgehammer would definitely result in disaster.

As for the psychological effect on the Russians that Operation Sledgehammer could have, Churchill had no illusions. The fact that the Soviet Union abandoned the real Second Front, making a non-aggression pact with Hitler and leaving Britain to face the entire strength of the German army for more than a year, was still fresh in his memory. He also was not concerned with Stalin's obsessive vision of the Second Front as purely a cross-channel invasion of northwestern France. Churchill was convinced that Stalin did not entirely realize, or did not want to realize, the costs and difficulties of amphibious operations and deemed it imprudent to sacrifice thousands of lives and risk the fate of his country in order to satisfy the demands of a brutal Soviet dictator. In this regard, Churchill wrote in his memoirs,

The Russians never understood in the smallest degree the nature of the amphibious operation necessary to disembark and maintain a great army upon a well-defended hostile coast. Even the Americans were at this time largely unaware of the difficulties. Not only sea but air superiority at the invasion point was indispensable. Moreover, there was a third vital factor. A vast armada of specially constructed landing craft, above all tank landing craft in numerous varieties, was the foundation of any successful heavily opposed landing. For the creation of this armada, as has been and as will be seen, I had long done my best. It could not be ready even on a minor scale before summer of 1943, and its power, as is now widely recognized, could not be developed on a sufficient scale till 1944.<sup>57</sup>

During the debate over what kind of strategy should be undertaken in 1942, the American proposal had a significant flaw. American planners recognized that they would be able provide for Sledgehammer in 1942 at most only four divisions and 700 aircraft.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Churchill, Winston S., *The Second World War, The Hinge of Fate, Africa Redeemed*, p. 34, Heron Books, 1968

<sup>57</sup> Churchill, *The Second World War, The Grand Alliance, War Comes to America*, p. 5

<sup>58</sup> Howard, p. 26

The US production, at that time, had not yet been fully organized. The war of the Atlantic, which in the words of Richard Overy, “was a crucial one for the Western Allies, for the simple reason that all their major arteries of communication and supply were across water,”<sup>59</sup> had not yet been won, and that made it impossible for the United States to transfer sufficient troops to the European continent. Under such circumstances, any cross-channel attack in 1942 would have to depend primarily on British troops. Understandably, the British were not willing to give up their peripheral strategy and risk troops in conducting an operation that in their opinion, most likely would end in disaster. American military authorities tried to manipulate British planners by threatening to reconsider the Europe-first doctrine and with “the possibility of concentrating U.S. offensive effort in the Pacific area considered.”<sup>60</sup> Yet the ultimate decision was up to President Roosevelt. In his view, some kind of active military operation in Europe was essential in 1942, since it would fulfill his main objective of helping the Russians. For him, actually conducting some kind of military operation was more important than the actual location where this operation would take place. That is why, although he was committed to Sledgehammer, he considered the possibility of accepting British terms, since it would be better to be involved in some action than to remain inactive, preparing for possible large-scale military operations in the following year. Roosevelt’s attitude might have been influenced by Churchill’s persistent efforts to prove the impossibility of Sledgehammer and the advantage of Gymnast. In his important telegram to the president, he wrote,

I am sure myself that French North Africa [“Gymnast”] is by far the best chance for effecting military relief to the Russian front in 1942. This has all along been in harmony with your ideas. In fact, it is your commanding idea. Here is the true Second Front of 1942. I have consulted the Cabinet and the Defense Committee, and we all agree. Here is the safest and most fruitful stroke that can be delivered this autumn.<sup>61</sup>

When American military authorities reported to President Roosevelt that the British were not ready for Sledgehammer, he instantly replied that he was not surprised. American military authorities were given instructions to find a compromise with the

<sup>59</sup> Overy, *Why the Allies Won*, p. 18

<sup>60</sup> Stoler, p. 76

<sup>61</sup> Churchill, *The Second World War, The Hinge of Fate, Africa Redeemed*, p. 24



British on some operation that would involve American land forces, and the decision to go for Gymnast, which was at once renamed Torch, was made.

The Soviet government was very disappointed with the Allied decision not to cross the channel, and Stalin bluntly expressed his regrets to Churchill during the prime minister's first official visit to Moscow in August 1942. For the Soviet dictator, it was quite incomprehensible that a belligerent country would not make attempts to win the battle with limited forces. Having been confronted with the bulk of German forces for more than a year, Stalin was convinced that the war could be won only at considerable cost, and he did not care much about the huge losses the Allies could have suffered had they ventured cross-channel in 1942. After Churchill told him that the landing on the French coast would be more harmful than helpful, Stalin replied that he had a different opinion, and that the real result would have been known only if the troops had been engaged in the battle. In his memoirs, Churchill recalled,

Stalin...said that his view about war was different. A man who was not prepared to take risk could not win a war. Why were we (British) so afraid of the Germans? He could not understand. His experience showed that troops must be blooded in battle. If you did not blood your troops you had no idea what their value was.<sup>62</sup>

Despite the strong disagreement with the strategic decision of the Western Allies in 1942, the Soviet government had to accept the existent reality. That did not make their demands for the Second Front less persistent in following war years. The matter was that in the eyes of the Western Allies, especially the Americans, the continued Soviet participation in the war remained the key to victory and they had to reckon with that. The Second Front issue still remained the main focus in the process of building the Allied strategy during 1943-1944.

The decision of the Western Allies to abandon all plans for crossing the channel in 1942 and instead to invade French North Africa dominated the next two years of the war. During this time, neither of the main anti-Hitler powers dramatically changed the principles of their grand strategies. The great strategic debate between Great Britain and the United States, which started after the Arcadia conference in January 1942, was

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<sup>62</sup> Churchill, *The Second World War, The Hinge of Fate, Africa Redeemed*, p. 63

revived again, and it took a number of fervent disputes between the Allies until they came to a decision to go for a cross-channel operation.

#### **E. BRITISH MEDITERRANEAN STRATEGY AND AMERICAN CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS**

The Allied landing in French North Africa, as well as the British offensive at El-Alamein and Soviet counteroffensive at Stalingrad, dramatically changed the global military situation. By the end of 1942 and beginning of 1943 the countries of the anti-Hitler coalition possessed the strategic initiative and controlled a considerable part of the territories recently occupied by the Axis. The possible Soviet collapse was no longer a threat and the position of the Allies in the Mediterranean was more solidified than a few months earlier. Nevertheless, the Axis powers were still quite strong and possessed a great natural resources, military production, and manpower. For the Allies, defeat no longer appeared likely, but neither did victory. The current situation required cardinal strategic decisions.

The Anglo-American Casablanca Conference in January 1943 produced a Mediterranean strategy calling for the major focus of the Allied military efforts on opening the Mediterranean and invading Sicily. The main objectives of the Mediterranean strategy were releasing shipping resources, obtaining military air bases for Allied bombers, diverting part of the German troops from the Eastern Front and, most of all, forcing Italy out of war.

The Mediterranean strategy was a direct result of the strategic decisions made by the Western Allies in the summer of 1942. After conducting Operation Torch, the disposition of US and British forces made a return to the cross-channel operation in 1943 (Operation Round-Up) unlikely. For the British and for Churchill personally, the only logical solution in this situation was to take advantage of current deployments and concentrate major military efforts on the Mediterranean theater, at the same time building up a separate force in England for the future cross-channel operation. Defending their position, the British asserted that,

Full exploitation of Torch in the Mediterranean, combined with a Bolero buildup and major bombing campaign could knock Italy out of the war and provide Russia with immediate relief by drawing off German forces to

hold a new Italian front, defend against a possible channel crossing, and perhaps deal with the Turks who would join the war in light of Allied Mediterranean action.<sup>63</sup>

The Americans, on the other hand, being old adversaries of the peripheral strategy, once again pushed for continued preparation and eventual conducting of cross-channel operation in the northwestern Europe. They were convinced that a large-scale operation in the Mediterranean would disperse Allied forces more than it would the Germans, thereby resulting in valueless campaigning and making any future cross-channel operation less probable. From General Marshall's perspective,

What was needed was an end to 'dabbling' in the Mediterranean and a shift of US forces back to England for cross-channel operations and a decisive confrontation to defeat the Wehrmacht in Europe – not merely to take advantage of a prior crack in German moral.<sup>64</sup>

Yet, on the eve of the usual collision between American and British approaches on what strategy should be undertaken in 1943, Americans, as in previous years, were at a considerable disadvantage. This time the problem was within American Civil-Military Relations. As noted above, the disposition of the Allied troops was disadvantageous for carrying out the cross-channel operation in 1943. This fact caused the disagreements among American high-level authorities about what strategic direction should be chosen. Indeed, American military planners faced a profound dilemma. In order to go for a cross-channel operation, the operations in the Mediterranean theater, and even in the Pacific, would have to be stopped, and even that could not guarantee that the cross-channel adventure would be implemented. The possible result might be no offensive operation whatsoever in 1943, which was unacceptable, given the situation in the Eastern Front and continued Soviet demands for the Second Front. In the case of the continuation of Mediterranean offensives, there would not be a cross-channel operation in 1943, and perhaps not even in 1944. That would call for the old question of whether or not Russia would continue to fight without the Second Front in Europe and how Germany could be defeated if Russia were out of the war. Having such a dilemma, one group of the military planners advocated a maximum buildup of military forces in England and abandoning

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<sup>63</sup> Stoler, p. 100

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 98

further Mediterranean operations, whereas another group insisted on the continuation of Mediterranean operations, since Round-Up was impossible in 1943 in any event, and because some military action should take place in 1943 to prevent Stalin from signing a separate peace with Germany. Navy authorities were also against a cross-channel operation in 1943, since it would draw the bulk of resources and manpower available, and therefore would not allow further offensive operations in the Pacific theater. Admiral Ernest King, touching on the question of possible strategy for 1943, said to the press, “In the last analysis, Russia will do nine-tenths of the job of defeating Germany.”<sup>65</sup> Strategic decisions made during 1942, and lack of agreement within the US armed forces predetermined the victory of the Mediterranean strategy over the cross-channel operation in 1943. The British approach of peripheral fighting prevailed again, as during the preceding year. When, before the Casablanca Conference, President Roosevelt asked General Marshall if there was a general agreement among the Joint Chiefs of Staff on the cross-channel operation issue in 1943, Marshall replied that, “there was not a united front on that subject, particularly among our planners.”<sup>66</sup> During the Casablanca conference, the better-prepared and coordinated British took advantage of American divisions and won approval for the strategic approach in 1943 – continuation of offensive operations in the Mediterranean theater, with the main objective being to conquer Sicily, and buildup of a separate force in England for the “eventual” cross-channel operation. To put it in Michael Howard’s words, “The Mediterranean strategy was in gestation between September and December 1942; at Casablanca it was born and legitimized.”<sup>67</sup>

The Mediterranean strategy has often been portrayed as an alternative to the Second Front in northwestern Europe in 1943. Professor Douglas Porch in his book “The Path to Victory” wrote that nobody but General Marshall described it as a

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<sup>65</sup> Stoler, p. 99

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 100

<sup>67</sup> Howard, p. 35

“‘fundamentally unsound’, ‘prestige strategy’ that attacked no German center of gravity, failed to help the USSR, and served principally as a venue for a perpetual, acrimonious Anglo-American spat.”<sup>68</sup> British historian John Ellis, in turn, wrote in 1990,

The Mediterranean is constantly over-emphasized in most English studies of the war. Indeed, when one realizes that in March 1943 the Germans had 175 combat divisions (including 29 panzer and panzer grenadier) on the Eastern Front and only 7-1/2 (4-1/2) in North Africa, and that even in June 1944 the figures for Russia/Italy were 157(30)/22(6), then it might well be thought that the whole campaign barely merits an extended footnote.<sup>69</sup>

Yet, close examination of the historical events indicates that this was not necessarily so. The Mediterranean strategy was not conceived as a substitute for the cross-channel operation in the northwestern Europe. During the next Anglo-American conference (Trident), which was held in Washington three months after the Casablanca conference, the Mediterranean theater was to be regarded as subsidiary to a cross-channel operation in northern France, which was called “Overlord.” The most compelling reason why the decision was made to go for a Mediterranean rather than a cross-channel operation is that no better alternatives existed until 1944 to engage the Germans in a more or less large-scale operation. Michael Howard, in this regard, gives three aspects of “Mediterranean strategy” that must be stressed.<sup>70</sup>

First, this strategy was basically opportunistic. By 1943, as a result of Operation Torch, substantial American and British forces were available in the Middle East. “There was neither the time nor the shipping available to transfer these troops to Europe to launch a cross-channel operation in 1943; so unless they were to remain idle for a year while the Russians continued to fight single-handed, some employment had to be found for them in the Mediterranean Theater.”<sup>71</sup> In other words, the Allies simply were not ready to conduct large-scale cross-channel operations at that time, and therefore found the theater where available troops could be used most effectively.

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<sup>68</sup> Porch, Douglas, *The Path to Victory, The Mediterranean Theater in World War II*, p. 661, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 2004

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 661

<sup>70</sup> Howard, p. 36

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 36

Second, the Mediterranean was the area where the Germans could be brought to battle. Hitler understood the strategic value of this region. The proximity of the Balkans and their vital supplies of Romanian oil would drive him to commit substantial German forces to defend the region, which would entail the withdrawal of forces from northwestern Europe and thereby facilitate future cross-channel operations.

Finally, providing help to the Russians was still of paramount importance. The opening of the Mediterranean would facilitate the flow of Lend-Lease aid to Russia through the Middle East and Persia. Moreover, to prevent the link up of the Allies with the Soviets, Hitler would have to withdraw some forces from Russia. There was no other theater in 1943 that could help the Russians more.

All in all, the Mediterranean strategy was a result of strategic debate between the United States and Great Britain, but it was not a substitute for a Second Front in Europe in 1943. Mediterranean operations were rather necessary preliminaries for the attack on northwestern Europe. The Western Allies and the United States in particular, were not ready yet for large-scale amphibious operations, but preparations were underway, and 1944 was going to be the decisive year for making ultimate decision.

## **F. THE SOVIET FACTOR**

If hitherto the main force which drove the Western Allies to plan for the opening of the Second Front in Europe was the necessity of keep Russia in the war and preventing the possibility of a separate peace between Hitler and Stalin, by the fall of 1943 a new compelling factor emerged – the profound transformation of the Soviet military capability and the possibility that Soviet Russia could destroy Nazi Germany even without the Second Front in Western Europe.

By that time, the Soviet Army had inflicted at least three stunning defeats on the Wehrmacht and seized the strategic initiative.

If victory in the Battle of Moscow gave the Russians inspiration and showed that the Germans were beatable, the victory at Stalingrad “symbolized the change in Soviet fortunes.”<sup>72</sup> The Stalingrad battle was truly the critical moment of the Second World War. It was a victory that was necessary not only for the Soviet Union, but also for the

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<sup>72</sup> Overy, *Russia's War, A History of the Soviet War Effort*, p. 186

Western Allies, since Soviet defeat in this battle could have made Germany invincible. The battle itself was not decisive. Germany still remained very powerful and was capable of continuing a long war of attrition. Yet, from then on, it was evident that the Soviet Army developed the ability to carry out large and complex operations against the Wehrmacht, which had until been deemed the world's most effective armed forces.

The Soviet victory in the battle of Kursk in the summer of 1943 proved to be the turning point on the Eastern Front. Preparing for the fight, Germany and Soviet Russia concentrated almost their full military strength in the area. The Soviet side numbered 1,336,000 men, 3,444 tanks, 2,900 aircraft, and 19,000 guns and was faced by 900,000 German soldiers, with 2,700 tanks, 2,000 aircraft, and over 10,000 guns.<sup>73</sup> The loss of this battle spelled a real disaster for Germany. The Soviet Army now had a string of victories behind it and was self-confident and resolute to achieve ultimate victory. The Germans in turn, being confronted by the Western Allies in the Mediterranean, were no longer able to hold everything in the East. To put it in the words of historian Richard Overy, "The battle of Kursk ended any realistic prospect of German victory in the east."<sup>74</sup>

The Western Allies were by no means blind to the danger of the increasing Soviet capability. Under their estimations, in the event of ongoing Soviet success, Russia was sure to dominate, and most likely to communize, the countries which would be liberated on the Soviet drive westward. Mark Stoler, in this regard, wrote, "Throughout the spring and summer of 1943 numerous planners and members of the JCS warned that the combination of Soviet victories and relative Western inaction would lead to Russian domination not merely of Eastern but perhaps of all Europe."<sup>75</sup> More and more American and British military authorities leaned toward the opinion that some cardinal measures should be taken as soon as possible to prevent the possible Soviet domination, at least in Western Europe. As early as January 1943, Admiral King warned that "unless the U.S. and Britain make some definite move toward the defeat of Germany, Russia will

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<sup>73</sup> Overy, *Russia's War, A History of the Soviet War Effort*, p. 201

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 210

<sup>75</sup> Stoler, p. 133

dominate the peace table.”<sup>76</sup> Three months later, another American official, the former Navy League president Gardiner said that Russia might “dictate the terms of German surrender in Berlin long before Anglo-American forces get within really effective striking distance of that capital – whereupon the major problem of Western Europe would be: How to halt the westward and southwestward drive of Russia?”<sup>77</sup>

The answer to this question suggested itself – to accelerate preparations and carry out the cross-channel operation in the northwestern Europe as soon as possible.

American high level political and military authorities realized clearly during the summer and fall of 1943 that conducting the cross-channel operation in the northwestern Europe could serve a dual purpose. First, it would satisfy long-stated Soviets demands for the Second Front and create a basis for their continued post-war cooperation. By that time, it was already clear that even if the Soviet Union would not dominate all Europe, it would emerge from the war with enormous power and influence. Based on that, the U.S. government came to the conclusion that the most viable policy in this situation would be to build a friendly and close relationship with Soviet Russia in the post-war era. The opening of the Second Front in Europe was an “indispensable” condition for any hope of the post-war cooperation with the Soviet Union.

Second, the cross-channel operation would guarantee that the Soviet Union would not dominate all Europe, that the countries liberated by Anglo-American forces would be under Western influence, and that Britain and the United States would have a large body of troops in Western Europe, thus making the Soviet Union more compliant in its relationships with the West.

Based on such reasoning and backed by the support of President Roosevelt, American military planners pressed for a cross-channel operation throughout the summer of 1943. As a result, during the next Anglo-American Conference (Quadrant) in August 1943, they obtained approval not only for a 1944 cross-channel assault (Overlord), but also for a contingency plan for the deployment of large numbers of Anglo-American

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<sup>76</sup> Stoler, p. 133

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 133



troops in Western and Central Europe in the event of rapid German collapse before the channel could be crossed. (Rankin). In essence, Overlord became a plan to cover either Soviet cooperation or hostility.

#### **G. TEHERAN CONFERENCE AND ULTIMATE DECISION FOR THE SECOND FRONT**

Despite the approval for “Overlord” the ultimate decision for the cross-channel operation was not made yet. As in previous war years, the different strategic approaches of the Western Allies revived the old debate. The invasion and surrender of Italy in the Mediterranean theater in September 1943, opened new opportunities for the Allies, and Churchill wanted to exploit them by postponing the cross-channel operation yet again. Being devoted to Mediterranean strategy, Churchill considered that a cross-channel assault was not necessary for defeating Germany, especially given the continued success of the Soviets on the Eastern Front and the Allies in the Mediterranean. In his memoirs, Churchill wrote,

...while I was always willing to join with the United States in a direct assault across the Channel on the German sea-front in France, I was not convinced that this was the only way of winning the war, and I knew that it would be a very heavy and hazardous adventure.<sup>78</sup>

Michael Howard, describing Churchill’s change of mind concerning operation Overlord, wrote,

The change in his attitude is significant and not easy to explain. Perhaps it was brought about by the excellence which the Germans had shown as defensive fighters in North Africa. Perhaps his original enthusiasm had been due rather to a desire to conciliate his two powerful allies than to any serious assessment of possibilities. Now that an alternative had presented itself he embraced it with ardour.<sup>79</sup>

The underlying differences between Britain and the United States over the proper strategy to implement in the European theater once again began to surface.

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<sup>78</sup> Churchill, Winston S., *The Second World War, Closing the Ring, Teheran to Rome*, p. 230, Heron Books, 1968

<sup>79</sup> Howard, p. 46

There were distinct signs of a general weakening in the British determination to carry out Overlord in 1944. After the successful Allied invasion of Sicily, Prime Minister Churchill declared,

I have no doubt myself that the right strategy for 1944 is maximum post-Husky (the invasion of Sicily), certainly to the Po, with option to attack westward in the south of France or north-eastward towards Vienna, and meanwhile to procure the expulsion of the enemy from the Balkans and Greece. I do not believe that 27 Anglo-American divisions are sufficient for Overlord in view of the extraordinary fighting efficiency of the German Army and the much larger forces they could so readily bring to bear against our troops even if the landings were successfully accomplished.<sup>80</sup>

The British attitude concerning a cross-channel operation in 1944 definitely was not appreciated by the Americans, who had pushed for such an operation since 1942, and who considered that 1944 was the best moment to launch it. The American Secretary of the Army Henry Stimson reported to President Roosevelt after visiting London,

We cannot rationally hope to cross the Channel and come to grips with our German enemy under a British commander. His prime Minister and his Chief of the Imperial Staff are frankly at variance with such a proposal. The shadows of Passchendaele and Dunkerque still hang too heavily over the imagination of these leaders of his government.<sup>81</sup>

Yet, unlike Anglo-American strategic debates in the previous war-years, now the odds were very much in American favor. By the summer of 1944, the Americans had a considerable preponderance of military means and troops over their British counterpart, and the direction of further military operations was more dependent on American decisions. The US government was resolute in its intention to implement the strategic decision in 1944, and the Teheran Conference, which gathered the three leaders of the main members of the anti-Hitler coalition for the first time, fully confirmed their position.

The Teheran Conference, which began on November 28, 1943 and lasted four days, marked a turning point in the relationship among the three Allied countries. The United States and the Soviet Union seemingly found the confluence of their strategic interests, whereas the British found themselves isolated. In essence, Great Britain lost a

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<sup>80</sup> Howard, p. 45

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., pp. 45-46

strategic debate for the first time in the war. After the victories of Stalingrad and Kursk, Stalin could argue for the long-desired Second Front in Europe from the position of strength that allowed Roosevelt to promote his strategic option for 1944 at the expense of British strategy. Moreover, giving Stalin the promise to launch a cross-channel operation in the spring-summer 1944, Roosevelt won a two-part bargain. As reciprocation for Operation Overlord, Stalin promised not only to launch a supporting operation in the east, but also to invade Japan after the defeat of Germany. Despite the desperate attempts of Churchill to obtain the consent from his counterparts for the possible delay of the cross-channel operation in favor of continued operations in the Mediterranean, Stalin and Roosevelt were unanimous in their intentions to make a channel crossing in 1944. After Stalin insisted on a firm date for Overlord, the 1st of May 1944 was agreed upon as a date of invasion. It might be said that despite disagreements during the Teheran Conference, Great Britain, the Soviet Union, and the United States of America worked out the common strategy in their fight against Nazi Germany for the first time in the whole course of the Second World War.

## **H. SUMMARY**

Operation Overlord began in the early hours of the morning of June 6, 1944. The Second Front in Europe, which had become a matter of desperate Soviet appeal and inter-Allied strategic discussions, was finally open. Appealing to Averell Harriman on June 10 1944, Stalin said, “We are going along a good road...The history of war never witnessed such a grandiose operation. Napoleon himself never attempted it. Hitler envisaged it but was a fool for never having attempted it.”<sup>82</sup> For him, the invasion of France symbolized the end of the burden the Soviet Union had borne for three years of war in facing the bulk of the German army. What he could not understand was that the failure of the Western Allies to launch a cross-channel operation earlier came not from bad faith, as he believed, but from differences in strategic approach between Great Britain and the United States. The Western Allies needed the Second Front in Europe no less than their Soviet counterpart since Soviet survival in war was the main precondition for ultimate Allied victory. Having different historical experiences and strategic resources, two Allied countries found themselves in different positions on the question of what kind of strategy

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<sup>82</sup> Overy, *Why the Allies Won*, p. 134

in the European theater should be undertaken in their common fight against Nazi Germany. Having a relatively weak army and limited economic resources, the British advocated for the so-called peripheral strategy, meaning war in the outlying theaters, avoiding decisive battles, supporting national resistance to tear down the enemy from within, bombardment and other ways of warfare. The British political leadership and high military command thought that British troops should be committed to battle at the right moment, when the enemy had been already weakened and was no longer able to continue fighting. The American traditions were totally different. The American strategic approach was to find the main enemy force, mobilize all necessary resources, concentrate them in the pivotal theater, and engage in decisive battle with the enemy. In the words of Richard Overy, “British arguments for a Mediterranean strategy reflected British priorities; cross-Channel invasion was the American way...”<sup>83</sup> During the course of the war, the two Allied countries were involved in lengthy debate about what kind of strategy to undertake. The United States needed the time to mobilize resources, accomplish rearmament, and send sufficient troops to the European theater to make an invasion of northwestern France possible. Any cross-channel operation before 1944 would have depended entirely on British troops, but the British remained wedded to their principles. Only when the United States had the preponderance of troops and the Soviet Union threatened to dominate post-war Europe, did the American strategic approach prevail.

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<sup>83</sup> Overy, *Why the Allies Won*, p. 141

## **IV. THE SECOND FRONT AS THE BEGINNING OF COLD WAR**

There has never been an agreed-upon fixed date for the start of the Cold War. For some historians, the Cold War began with Winston Churchill's Iron Curtain Speech on March 5, 1946 at Westminster College in Fulton. Others consider that it started with the reconstruction of western occupation zones in Germany and the formation of Federal Republic of Germany in 1948. A third group maintains that the starting point of the Cold War was the signing of the North Atlantic Treaty on April 4, 1949.

**This study argues that the Cold War began much earlier, in June 1944, with the opening of the Second Front in Europe, which created the premise for a direct clash of Anglo-American and Soviet interests on the continent of Europe, a confrontation that embodied, and gave concrete strategic form to the ideological rivalries that had arisen as a consequence of the Russian Revolution.**

### **A. THE ESSENCE AND PRIMARY OBJECTIVES OF INTER-ALLIED COOPERATION**

Inter-Allied cooperation during the Second World War, between Great Britain and the United States on the one hand, and between both the Soviet Union on the other hand, became possible because of one single reason – existence of a strong common enemy, Nazi Germany. The Allied countries needed each other because none of them would have been able to defeat Germany fighting alone.

Given the totally different political, social, and economic systems of the Anglo-Americans and the Russians, their cooperation during the Second World War can hardly be considered close. Stalin's ideologically-grounded distrust of the Western Allies and Churchill's ferocious anticommunism made the relationship between Allies especially complicated. Under such circumstances, the logical question was whether or not the main members of the anti-Hitler coalition would be able to cooperate after the German threat was eliminated. William R. Keylor in his study "The Twentieth Century World" gives quite a clear answer,

In the light of the radically dissimilar political, social, and economic systems of the Anglo-Americans and the Russians, which had given rise to intense mutual antagonism before they were thrown together in the join

crusade against Nazi Germany, it was inevitable that this ideological hostility would resurface once the military collapse of Germany removed the only important reason for them to continue to cooperate.<sup>84</sup>

The opening of the Second Front in northwestern Europe did not completely eliminate the German threat, but it created the premise for the division of Europe into the two spheres of influence, the Western and the Soviet respectively, and for the probable shape of the post-war world, thereby causing the confrontation between the Western Allies and the Soviet Union on the political level.

In general, inter-Allied cooperation during the Second World War can be characterized as the pursuit by two sides of two different goals:

- The main objective of the Western Allies was to keep the Soviet Union in the war and prevent a possible separate peace between Stalin and Hitler;
- The main objective of the Soviet Union was to make the Western Allies open the Second Front in the European theater.

With the launching of Allied cross-channel operations in June 1944, these objectives were achieved. The Western Allies had the Soviet Union still fighting the bulk of German forces on the Eastern Front, while the Soviet Union, in turn, finally obtained its long-desired large-scale military operation in the West. Despite the fact that Allied cooperation continued, the ultimate goal of the destruction of Nazi Germany had not been achieved and yet, from the moment the Second Front was established, there began a general deterioration in the relationship between the Western Allies and the Soviet Union.

Having achieved their primary goals, the Western Allies and the Soviet Union no longer deemed mutual cooperation an urgent necessity. Under such circumstances, the deep antagonisms between political and economic systems led to the clash of their interests in Europe, which planted the seeds of the Cold War.

## **B. THE FIRST BATTLEGROUND OF THE COLD WAR**

The first vivid sign of the confrontation between the Western Allies and the Soviet Union after the opening of the Second Front was the Russian refusal to aid the Polish Home Army uprising in Warsaw, which began on July 31, 1944.

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<sup>84</sup> Kaylor, p. 190

Having gained the momentum from a large-scale offensive in the summer of 1944, the Red Army suddenly stopped on the Vistula River in August, once Soviet leaders learned that the Polish underground army, which owed allegiance to the Polish London Government, was about to raise a general insurrection against the Germans in Warsaw. Evidently, for the Soviet government the possible success of the uprising, headed by the pro-London Polish leader General Bor-Komorowsky, would have meant nothing, but partial loss of control over the Polish capital. By that time, all liberated Polish territories had been placed under the control of a Communist Committee of National Liberation, the organization formed by the Soviet government in order to establish the Communist control over Poland after the war. There is no doubt that the Soviet summer offensive in Poland was stopped in order not to deny Polish leaders who were supported by Polish London Government any chance to take over. This assertion seems especially clear given the fact that the Soviet Union refused not only to give any military and material help to the Polish insurgents, but also to assist the Western Allies in dropping supplies in the Warsaw area, by refusing them use of airfields in Soviet territory.

On August 16, 1944, the Soviet government conveyed to the American government the following statement,

The Soviet Government cannot of course object to English or American aircraft dropping arms in the region of Warsaw, since this is an American and British affair. But they decidedly object to American or British aircraft, after dropping arms in the region of Warsaw, landing on Soviet territory, since the Soviet Government do not wish to associate themselves either directly or indirectly with the adventure in Warsaw.<sup>85</sup>

Stalin, in turn, replying to Churchill's and Roosevelt's mutual appeal for providing immediate help to the Poles, described the events in Warsaw as following,

Sooner or later the truth about the group of criminals who have embarked on the Warsaw adventure in order to seize power will become known to everybody. These people have exploited the good faith of the inhabitants of Warsaw, throwing many almost unarmed people against the German

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<sup>85</sup> Churchill, Winston S., *The Second World War, Triumph and Tragedy, The Tide of Victory*, p. 118, Heron Books, 1968

guns, tanks, and aircraft. A situation has arisen in which each new day serves, not the Poles for the liberation of Warsaw, but the Hitlerites who are inhumanly shooting down the inhabitants of Warsaw.<sup>86</sup>

These words indicate the Soviet attitude toward anti-Nazis who were not Communists and the new Soviet policy toward the Western Allies.

Abandoned by the Soviet Union, the Warsaw uprising was brutally suppressed by the Nazis. Winston Churchill in his memoirs wrote,

The struggle in Warsaw had lasted more than sixty days. Of the 40,000 men and women of the Polish Underground Army about 15,000 fell. Out of a population of a million nearly 200,000 had been stricken. The suppression of the revolt cost the German Army 10,000 killed, 7,000 missing, and 9,000 wounded.<sup>87</sup>

It must be said that, in Richard Overy words, "...Western Allies could not tolerate...the almost certain fact that any new Polish state born of German defeat would be dominated by the Soviet Union."<sup>88</sup> Nevertheless, it was Russian refusal to render any aid to the Polish insurgents or to assist the English and Americans in doing so that produced the crisis in relationship between the Allies and made it clear that the priorities of the Soviet policy toward the Western Allies had been changed. The Soviet behavior, vain Anglo-American attempts to reach a compromise with Stalin, and the ultimate result of the struggle in Warsaw indicate that the Soviet Union and the Western Allies were already in a state of confrontation during the late summer of 1944. This would hardly have been possible if the Second Front in Europe had not been open yet, since the Second Front was the main thing the Soviet Union needed from the Western Allies, and the Soviet leaders would not have risked the opening of that front in Europe by opening confrontation with the Western powers. Richard Overy in his book "Russia's War" wrote, "...the agony of Warsaw could be regarded....as the first battleground of the Cold War."<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Churchill, *The Second World War, Triumph and Tragedy, Tide of Victory*, p. 120

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 127-128

<sup>88</sup> Overy, *Russia's War, A History of the Soviet War Effort*, p. 247

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 247



### C. THE SPHERE OF INFLUENCE DIVISION

Another indication of the growing West-Soviet confrontation after the opening of the Second Front in Europe was the way in which the Allies behaved in liberated territories. During the late summer of 1944, the Soviet Army penetrated into Southern Europe and started establishing pro-Communist governments in almost every country, they liberated. Often, this was done without even any notice to the Western Allies. Thus, the Soviet Union declared war on Bulgaria with only thirty minute's notice to the British and Americans, and while in the midst of peace negotiations with the Bulgarians.<sup>90</sup> This and other facts gave no doubt that "Soviet leaders were determined to create a political structure in Eastern Europe that would give them the security they had failed to get from the pre-war system."<sup>91</sup> In fact, that meant Soviet Communist domination of Eastern Europe in place of German hegemony. The Americans and British, on the other hand, pursued totally different objectives. "Britain and the United States did not want the countries liberated in Europe to become Communist. They wished them to remain as far as possible within the Western camp and the world market."<sup>92</sup> The consistent communization of Eastern Europe caused a deep concern among the Western Allies and made them revise some principles of their policy toward Soviet Russia. The Soviet Union was still deemed to be an ally, but it was obviously regarded as a post-war adversary. Both the Western Allies and the Soviet Union strove to occupy as much territory as possible in order to establish their spheres of influence. Stalin told Tito, in this regard, "This war is not as in the past; whoever occupies a territory also imposes on it its own social system. Everyone imposes his social system as far as his army can reach. It cannot be otherwise."<sup>93</sup> Similar ideas were expressed by General Eisenhower when he advocated for recognition of the de Gaulle government after France was liberated, "if France falls into the orbit of any other country the other countries of Europe will do the same," and it would not be "in our interest to have the continent of Europe dominated by any single power."<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Stoler, p. 214

<sup>91</sup> Overy, *Russia's War, A History of the Soviet War Effort*, p. 250

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 251

<sup>93</sup> Harper, p. 122

<sup>94</sup> Stoler, p. 214

#### **D. THE CRUCIAL SOLUTIONS OF THE YALTA CONFERENCE**

The Yalta Conference of the three Allied leaders, which took place from February 4 to February 11 1945 in the Crimean resort of Yalta, practically solidified the division of Europe into the two spheres of influence that had been forming since the opening of the Second Front in Europe. On the one hand, the conference confirmed the Allied determination to defeat and de-Nazify Germany on the terms of unconditional surrender, thereby destroying the last hope of the Nazis of splitting the coalition. Two weeks after the conference, General Marshall said, “They [Germans] have always planned on a split of Allies. They never for one moment calculated that Allies could continue to conduct combined operations with complete understanding and good will.”<sup>95</sup> On the other hand, it was agreed that separate spheres of influence would be established in Germany after the Allied troops occupied the country, a decision that would result in nothing but confrontation between the Allies in the post-war future. Yet the main issue of the Yalta conference that emphasized the growing confrontation between the Western Allies and the Soviet Union was the question of Poland’s future. Winston Churchill, in this regard, said, “Poland had indeed been the most urgent reason for the Yalta Conference, and was to prove the first of the great causes which led to the breakdown of the Grand Alliance.”<sup>96</sup>

The Western countries, Great Britain and the United States, insisted on conducting free and independent elections in Poland to form a Polish provisional government. It meant that representatives of the Polish London Government would participate in elections, and would have a real chance to win. For Soviet leaders, who strove to impose Soviet domination and who had already formed a pro-Soviet Polish provisional government, this was unacceptable. What Stalin really needed was at least informal recognition by the English and Americans of the current Polish provisional government. Stalin was sure that if the pro-Communist Polish government could be granted even temporary legitimacy, it would become the dominant political power in the

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<sup>95</sup> Stoler, p. 226

<sup>96</sup> Churchill, Winston S., *The Second World War, Triumph and Tragedy, The Iron Curtain*, p. 36, Heron Books, 1968

future. Stalin insisted that it was necessary to acknowledge the current Polish provisional government since at that time it was impossible to conduct free and independent elections due to the war-time reality.

Winston Churchill in his memoirs conveyed Stalin's attitude regarding Poland,

It would naturally be better to have a Government based on free elections, but the war had so far prevented that. But the day was near when elections could be held. Until then we must deal with the Provisional Government, as we had dealt, for instance with General de Gaulle's Government in France, which also was not elected. He did not know whether Beirut or General de Gaulle enjoyed greater authority, but it had been possible to make a treaty with General de Gaulle, so why could we not do the same with an enlarged Polish Government, which would not be less democratic? It was not more reasonable to demand more from Poland than from France.<sup>97</sup>

This message gives a strong reason to suggest that Stalin tried to establish Soviet control over Poland as retaliation to the already existent Western control over France.

Although Soviet leaders made some concessions regarding the Polish question (including in the Provisional government democratic leaders from Poland itself and those who lived abroad), all in all the decision concerning Poland was made in the Soviet favor, and the country was ultimately left in the sphere of Soviet interests. The part of the joint declaration of Great Britain, the United States of America, and the Soviet Union concerning Poland ran as follows,

A new situation has been created in Poland as a result of her complete liberation by the Red Army. This calls for the establishment of a Polish Provisional Government which can be more broadly based than was possible before the recent liberation of Western Poland. The Provisional

Government which is now functioning in Poland should therefore be reorganized on a broader democratic basis, with the inclusion of democratic leaders from Poland itself and from Poles abroad.<sup>98</sup>

The decisions made during the Yalta Conference concerning the establishment of spheres of influence over Germany and especially de-facto approval of the Soviet control over Poland signify that Europe had already been divided into two spheres of influence,

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<sup>97</sup> Churchill, *The Second World War, Triumph and Tragedy, The Iron Curtain*, p. 49

<sup>98</sup> Churchill, *The Second World War, Triumph and Tragedy, The Iron Curtain*, p. 54

and that the West-Soviet confrontation over Europe had already begun. The Second Front in Europe was the factor which produced the struggle between the Western Allies and the Soviet Union over spheres of influence and made the West-Soviet confrontation clear.

#### **E. THE COLD WAR ON THE WAY**

After the Yalta Conference, the relationship between the Western Allies and the Soviet Union rapidly deteriorated. Among many reasons, there was a breach of the Yalta accords by the Soviet Union with the continued communizing of Eastern Europe. But the most important reason, which brought a fundamental change in the relations between the Soviet Union and the Western Allies, was the continued destruction of German military power. There is no doubt that even during the last months of the war the Western powers and the Soviet Union needed each other, as the Anglo-American setback during fierce German counteroffensive in the Ardennes during the fall and winter of 1944 clearly indicated. The German temporary success compelled General Marshall to say,

...if Germany beat us in this counterattack and particularly if the Russians failed to come in on our side," the United States would have to adopt a defensive position in Europe and let the American people decide "whether they wanted to go on with the war enough to raise the new armies which would be necessary to do it.<sup>99</sup>

Due to the Soviet counteroffensive on the Eastern Front, launched in response to the pleas of the Western Allies, the Anglo-American adventure was saved. General Eisenhower, in this regard, said to General Marshall that, "without a Soviet offensive in the east, 'a quick decision cannot be obtained.'"<sup>100</sup> The inter-Allied cooperation was still an important factor for ultimate victory. Nevertheless, this cooperation was not as crucial as it had been before the opening of the Second Front. Given the fact that after the Battle of Kursk Stalin was quite certain that the Soviet Union was capable of winning the war using only its own military forces,<sup>101</sup> the Second Front in northwestern Europe was the most that the Soviet Union could derive from the inter-Allied cooperation. The Western Allies, in turn, were no longer concerned about the possibility of Soviet collapse or separate peace between Stalin and Hitler. With the opening of the Second Front in

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<sup>99</sup> Stoler, p. 221

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., p. 221

<sup>101</sup> Overy, Russia's War, A History of the Soviet War Effort, p. 222

Europe the Western Allies and the Soviet Union lost the main driving force for cooperation. The weakened Nazi Germany, which was about to collapse very soon, remained the only minor bond of their union.

As noted above, the nature of the Soviet political system and Soviet leadership caused the growing confrontation between the Western powers and Communist Russia. There is no surprise that under such circumstances, the policy of the Western powers toward the Soviet Union was significantly reassessed. The British prime minister, being a fervent anti-Communist, was especially prompt to establish new principles of relationship with the Soviet ally. In his memoirs, Winston Churchill presents the main points of strategy and policy which in his view should have been implemented during the last months of the Second World War,

First, that Soviet Russia had become a mortal danger to the free world.

Secondly, that a new front must be immediately created against her onward sweep.

Thirdly, that this front in Europe should be as far east as possible.

Fourthly, that Berlin was the prime and true objective of the Anglo-American armies.

Fifthly, that the liberation of Czechoslovakia and the entry into Prague of American troops was of high consequence.

Sixthly, that Vienna, and indeed Austria, must be regulated by the Western powers, at least upon equality with the Russian Soviets.

Seventhly, that Marshal Tito's aggressive pretensions against Italy must be curbed.

Finally, and above all, that a settlement must be reached on all major issues between the West and the East in Europe before the armies of democracy melted, or the Western Allies yielded any part of the German territories they have conquered, or, as it could soon be written, liberated from totalitarian tyranny.<sup>102</sup>

Churchill's plans were not implemented because the American military authorities rejected them, on the grounds that they were unwise from a military point of view and because at that time Churchill did not have a decisive voice in the Allied

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<sup>102</sup> Churchill, *The Second World War, Triumph and Tragedy, The Iron Curtain*, p. 116

military planning.<sup>103</sup> Nevertheless, such assessment of the political and strategic situation at the end of the Second World War indicates that the Western Allies and the Soviet Union were, in essence, under the conditions of Cold War, which had not yet been officially proclaimed.

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<sup>103</sup> Keylor, p. 190

## V. CONCLUSION

The Second Front issue has attracted the attention of many historians since the end of the Second World War. Indeed, the Second Front in Europe was the prime concern of the Soviet Union and main object of Allied strategic debate for almost three war years, from the first Anglo-American Conference in December 1941 until the very moment of launching cross-channel operations in the northwestern France in June 1944. The Second Front had a tremendous impact on the general course of the war and, in the words of Richard Overy, “sealed Hitler’s fate.”<sup>104</sup> Finally, the Second Front in Europe was the factor that gradually influenced the shape of the post-war world and practically started the Cold War between the nominal Allies.

There is a widespread recognition now that the Soviet Union played a decisive role in defeating Nazi Germany. From the German invasion in June 1941 till the last days of the war, the Soviet Union drew the bulk of German forces and was involved in the world’s largest land battles. The decisive victories of the Second World War were won on the Eastern Front. Richard Overy wrote, “The great paradox of the Second World War is that democracy was saved by the exertions of communism.”<sup>105</sup> Yet, being confronted by the bulk of the German army, the Soviets hoped that the Western Allies would open the Second Front in Europe to relieve the Soviet Union from German pressure. The Soviet government demanded the establishment of the Second Front in Europe from the first day the Soviet Union was involved in war. The Soviet appeal was so desperate that Stalin even suggested to Churchill on one occasion to send three or four Russian Army Corps to England to do the job if the British were afraid.<sup>106</sup>

Given the desperate Soviet pleas and the shape of the post-war world, there are still the questions as to why it took so long for the Western Allies to open the Second Front in Europe and whether or not the Second Front could have been opened prior to June 1944.

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<sup>104</sup> Overy, *Why the Allies Won*, p. 21

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3

<sup>106</sup> Churchill, *The Second World War, The Grand Alliance, War Comes to America*, pp. 5-6

There exists opinion among some historians who defend the Soviet Union that the reason why the Western Allies postponed a cross-channel operation until June 1944 was to keep the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany fighting each other as long as possible, so that they would have exhausted one another and the Allies would have been able to step in at the right moment, thereby winning the war at low cost and, at the same time, preserving Europe from Nazi or Communist domination. This study has argued that this was not so.

First, the Western Allies needed the Second Front in Europe as much as the Soviet Union. It did not take long for the United States and Great Britain to realize that their success in war would entirely depend on the survival of the Soviet Union. A large-scale Anglo-American military operation on the European continent was the way that could best ensure Soviet survival.

Secondly, the opening of the Second Front in Europe was the best guarantee to prevent possible renewal of the Hitler-Stalin pact, which would have made Germany invincible. Waiting for the right moment to step in would have been an unjustifiable risk of losing the war.

Finally, the Western Allies faced the German threat as well. The United States was literally involved in the war on two sides, against Germany in Europe and Japan in the Pacific. Under such circumstances, the Western Allies could not remain inactive, preoccupied with preserving their military power and resources.

This study argues that there were three main reasons that compelled the Western Allies to postpone the opening of the Second Front until June 1944.

The first, and most important, reason was the different visions and strategic approaches between Great Britain and the United States on the ways of waging war in Europe. Being a sea power, and not possessing a large land army, the British adhered to the so-called peripheral strategy. They were convinced that the best way to destroy Nazi Germany was avoiding decisive battles, tearing down the Germans in peripheral theaters, supporting national resistance in the occupied territories to weaken Germany from within, wide-scale bombardment of military assets, and other actions that could significantly weaken German military capacity and ensure a relatively propitious outcome in the



crucial battle. The Americans, on the other hand, having huge potential material and manpower resources, considered that ultimate victory over the enemy could be won only by engaging enemy troops in decisive battle in the pivotal theater. Therefore, their main task was to mobilize resources as soon as possible and concentrate them in the proper place for the decisive engagement.

Being devoted to their strategic approaches, Great Britain and the United States plunged into long strategic debate over what course of action to undertake. Conducting large-scale military operations in northwestern France, which required huge material and manpower resources, fitted the American approach. In the eyes of American high military authorities, such an operation would have been a decisive and justifiable battle since it would have drawn considerable German forces from the pivotal Eastern Front thus preserving Russia from collapse as a main force in the fight against Nazi Germany. For the British, such a military operation would have been a disaster, and therefore would not have provided any meaningful aid to Russia. They advocated a Mediterranean strategy, which was to conduct subsidiary military operations in the Middle East and Mediterranean as necessary preconditions for conducting cross-channel operations in the northwestern Europe. Due to the fact that American re-armament had not yet been completed, the United States did not have a decisive voice in the strategic dispute throughout 1942-1943. The British, in turn, were reluctant to make any deviations from their principles. These disagreements in strategic approaches and failure to find a compromise concerning cross-channel operations precluded the opening of the Second Front in northwestern Europe until June 1944.

The second factor that made it impossible to open the Second Front in Europe before June 1944 was insufficiency of military means and forces necessary for conducting large-scale amphibious operations. Due to the geographical location of the United States, accumulating an Anglo-American military force large enough to conduct massive cross-channel operations was a time-consuming process. Moreover, it was a matter of paramount importance to gain control of the Atlantic to ensure the sea-lines for shipping troops and supplies from North America. It was impossible to plan large-scale offensive operations in Western Europe without taking these factors into account. Some American military authorities, General Marshall and General Eisenhower in particular,

contemplated cross-channel operations in 1942 (Sledgehammer) and in 1943 (Round-Up). But, given that the United States did not have sufficient troops and landing craft at that time, these operations were to be conducted at British expense. Only in 1944, when the Battle of the Atlantic was won and the United States gained the preponderance in troops, did the cross-channel operation become possible.

The third important factor that prompted the Western Allies to open the Second Front in Europe was the Red Army's achievements on the Eastern Front, and as a result the threat of possible Soviet domination of Europe. By the fall of 1943, it became clear that the Soviet Union was capable of destroying Nazi Germany even if the Second Front in Europe were not established. High-level authorities in the West had no doubt that, if the Western powers did not take certain measures, the Soviet Union would dominate and, most likely, communize the entire European continent. This fact compelled the Western Allies to accelerate preparations and carry out operation "Overlord" on June 6 1944 even though the risk of failure was rather high. Given the British adherence to the peripheral Mediterranean strategy and the natural complications of amphibious operations, it might be assumed that had not the menace of Soviet domination over Europe been so obvious, the cross-channel invasion of Normandy could have been postponed for the indefinite future.

The opening of the Second Front in Europe marked the highest point of cooperation between the Western Allies and the Soviet Union during the years of the Second World War. From that point on, the relationship between the Allied countries seriously deteriorated. Although the Allies were still tied together in the fight against the common enemy, their bond was not as strong as it used to be. The inevitability of German defeat and irreconcilable political, social, and economic systems cast the Western Allies and the Soviet Union into the struggle over spheres of influence. The great irony of the Second Front was that it left no hope of revival for Nazi Germany, but at the same time started a new confrontation, one which would dominate international relations for the next forty-five years. The Bipolar World and the Cold War were born in June 1944, at the moment of the highest level of unity between the Allies. The importance of that lesson should be learned to prevent such cataclysms in the future.

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